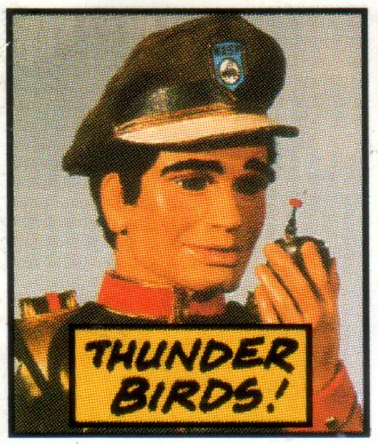
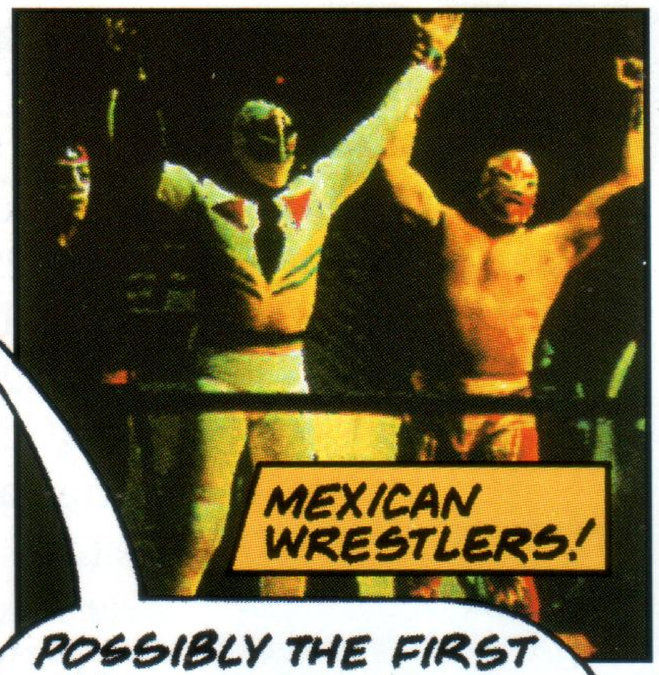


HEROES ON FILM

#1 MAY, 1995
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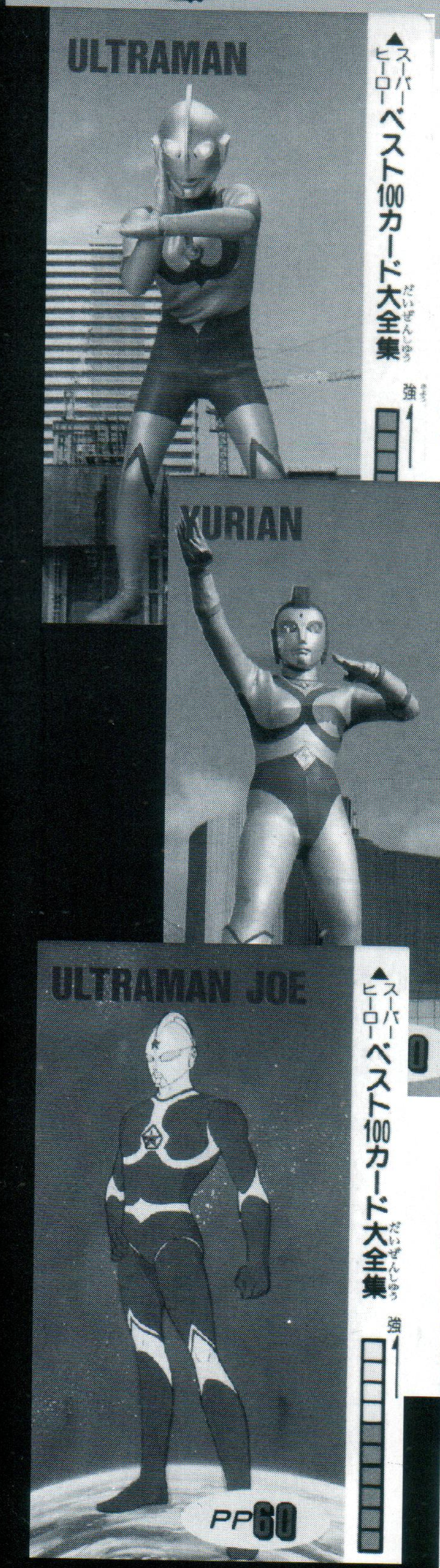
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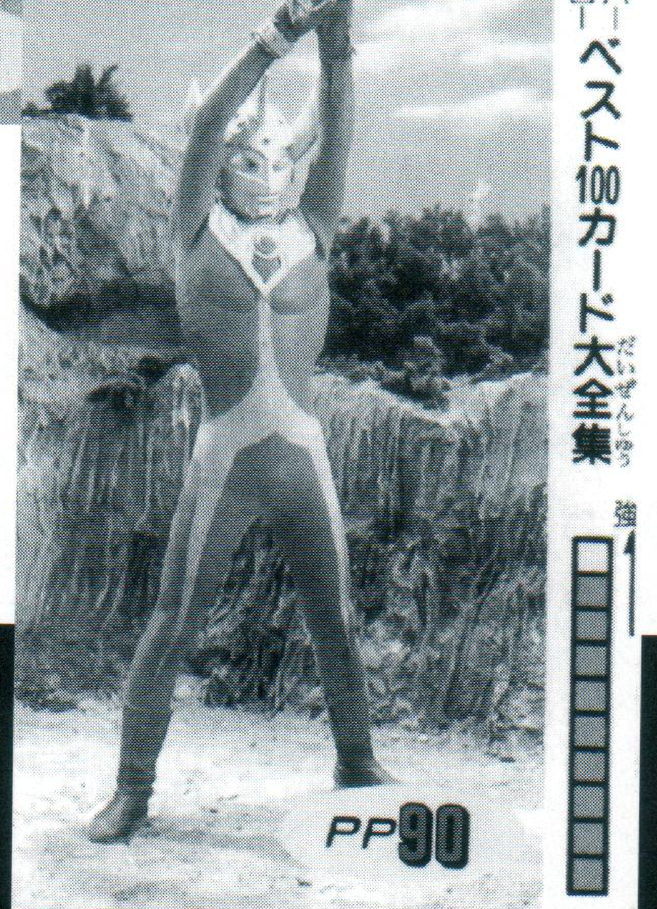


CELLULOID AND VIDEO HEROES FROM JAPAN, U.S.A., ITALY, KOREA, BRITAIN, HONG KONG, MEXICO, AND THE PHILIPPINES!



ULTRA SCAN







Okay, so you remember the original series ULTRAMAN (TBS; 1966), and wonder whatever happened to the big guy from Nebula M78. Well, he himself never really returned to the U.S., but, along with his younger brothers, became a regular icon of Japanese TV for decades to come. The only other Ultra Brothers to get shown (in English, anyway) in America were ULTRASEVEN (TBS; 1967), and Ultraman Great, in ULTRAMAN: TOWARD THE FUTURE (South Australian Film Corp.; 1990). But in Japan, there are at least six other Ultra programs, all produced by the Tsuburaya Company for Japan's network TBS: RETURN OF ULTRAMAN (1971), ULTRAMAN ACE (1972), ULTRAMAN TARO (1973), ULTRAMAN LEO (1974), and ULTRAMAN 80 (1980, of course). There's also UL TRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO (1994), still not shown in America despite its being filmed <u>in</u> California, all in English, and with an all-American cast! There were additional Ultra-type programs, loosely related shows like ULTRA FIGHT and ANDRO MELOS. There have, of course, been Ultra movies too. In time, Heroes on Film hopes to go indepth on all these TV shows, spinoffs, and movies.

The Ultramen are worldwide famous figures, one of the hottest marketing gimmicks since Mickey Mouse (Ultraman dolls, shirts, mugs, books, posters, noodles, candy and underwear are more widespread than rules in a Catholic school). Why are these heroic brothers so universally loved? Well, what's not to like about silver & red giants who so selflessly protect Earth (Japan in particular) from alien invaders and giant monsters of the post-Godzilla variety?! Godzilla maker Eiji Tsuburaya supplied costumes & other FX to the first few Ultra programs, and after he bit the tatami mat, his replacements kept that Godzillian tradition going! What follows is a personal look at Ultraman, and how these heroes affected my life.

The first Ultra series, the 39-part ULTRAMAN (actually a semi-sequel to ULTRA Q, a non-superhero series with the same types of monsters) has a special place in my heart, since the show, like GREEN HORNET, had such a profound effect on me when I was a tiny

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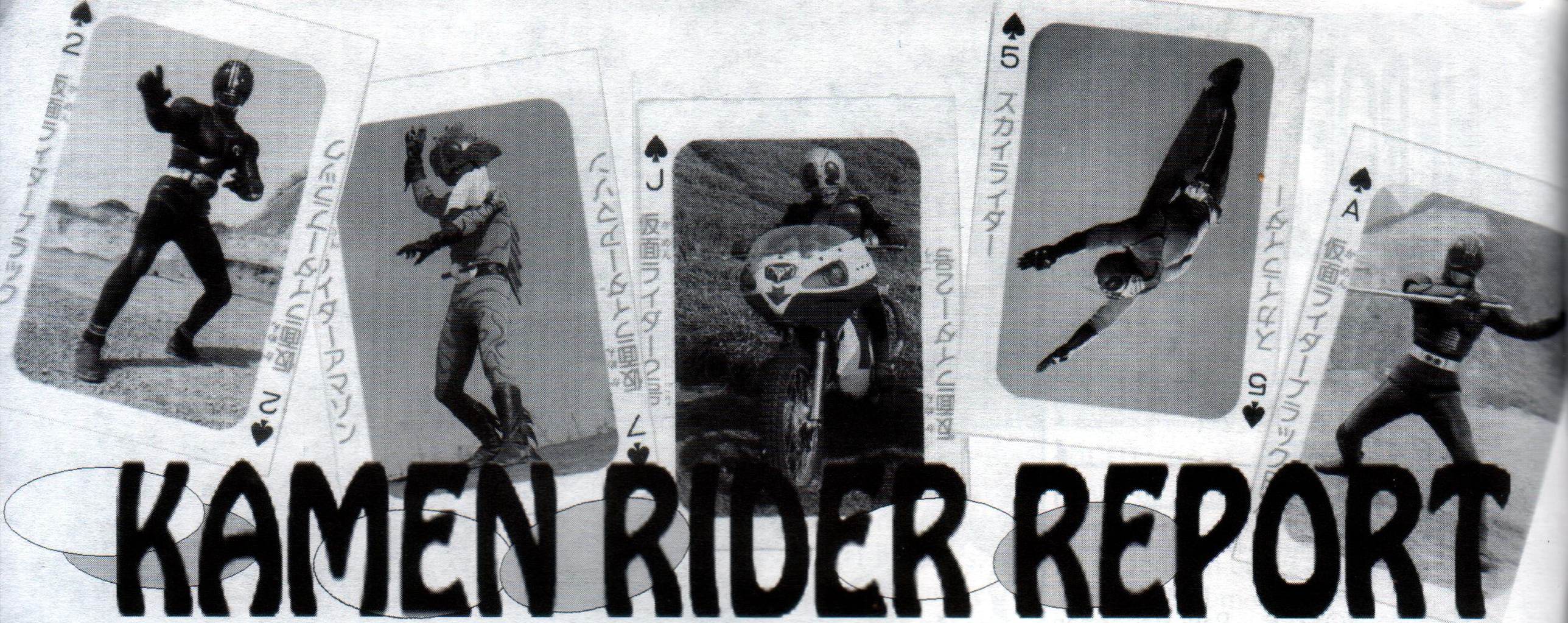
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Though produced in 1967 and not released to the U.S. theatrically until 1976, it wasn't until 1993 that I finally saw Italy's exciting movie, THE THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN (starring Brad Harris and Tony Kendall) and two of its wacky sequels! As I sat there mesmerized by this super-fun, campy adventure, I was annoyed that it had taken 26 years for me to finally discover what has long since become one of my favorite non-oriental films! I'd say our fandom is terribly flaw ed if such masterpieces remain unknown, while everyone has heard of overrated hype like Michael Keaton's BATMAN farces. Our superhero scene has more cartoon rags & comic books than TV has pathetically hyped talk shows, yet why was there no publication which focused exclusively on all live action superhero movies? Rest assured I'm not a comic book r eader, so any comic input in this magazine will be kept to a minimum. What you hold before you is what I believe is the U.S.A.'s first mag azine on all live action superheroes of film and video. Once more, the topic is not comics, and the topic is not cartoons. We'r e talking 3-d heroes, superheroes played by real people, often involving special effects, action and stunts.

The success of the seven "3 Supermen" movies of Italy pav ed the way for imitations like 3 SUPER STOOGES, and the 3 SUPER GUYS films. There was also an earlier movie called KRIMINAL (Umberto Lenzi; 1966), inspired by a comic book serial of the same title; mostly a 007-type of movie

(continued on page 18)



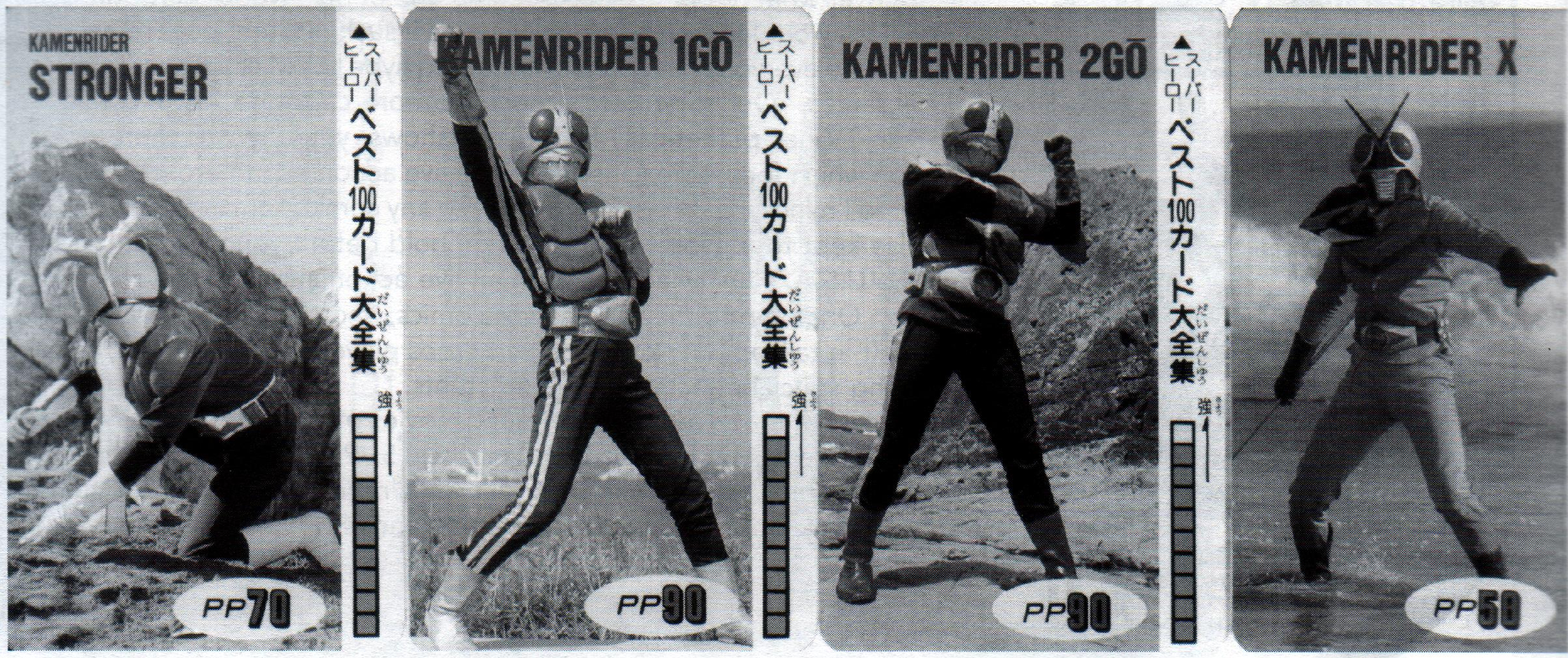


KAMEN RIDER REPORT

If you consider yourself a superhero fan and still don't know what a Kamen Rider is, you've lived a sheltered life. Kamen means 'mask' in Japanese, but weather you call these inspirational heroes Kamen Riders, Kamen Laida or Masked Riders, they're the epitome of Japanese superheroism, the only more important genre being the overshadowing Ultra Brothers.

The first Kamen Rider series, appropriately titled KAMEN RIDER (Toei; 1971) lasted a whopping 98 episodes! Based on designs by Shotaro Ishimori, it came from Toei, the same guys that brought us PRINCE OF SPACE, JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT, GEKKO KAMEN and of course, GOLDEN BAT in the 1960s. KAMEN RIDER was easily the best of these early adventures, for its combination of sci-fi and martial arts. Never before was anything this action packed on TV, even the Ultra series came off as tame by comparison. KAMEN RIDER either directly or indirectly inspired every live action Toei superhero series to follow, and set the pace for the remainder of the 1970s. Were it not for KAMEN RIDER, there'd be no KIKAIDER, no Sentais, no GO RANGERS or POWER RANGERS, no VR TROOPERS, etc. KAMEN RIDER set the pace for superhero TV as we know and love it today.

The series itself told the tale of two bug-eyed motorcyclists, Kamen Riders 1 & 2, and their on going war with monsters & scientists of the evil group Shocker. The format proved successful enough for numerous sequels; TV shows (averaging 52 episodes each) like: KAMEN RIDER V3 (1973), KAMEN RIDER X (1974), KAMEN RIDER AMAZON (1974-'75), KAMEN RIDER STRONGER (1975), KAMEN RIDER SHIN (1979), KAMEN RIDER SUPER 1 (1980), KAMEN RIDER BLACK (1988), and KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX (1989). There have also been exciting mini-movies (shown theatrically, though not necessarily feature-length) about the many Kamen Riders, flicks like KAMEN RIDER VS. SHOCKER, SUPER RIDERS WITH THE DEVIL, FRANKENSTEIN'S KUNG FU MONSTER, and the FX extravaganzas



KAMEN RIDER ZETO and KAMEN RIDER J! For different reasons, all are fun. The earlier TV shows are crude classics, they're also campy and tacky. But making up for these unintended laughs is the heart & spirit put into the episodes, and oh those wildly exciting battles! Only a jerk wouldn't enjoy seeing Hiroshi Miyauchi (as Kamen Rider V3) singlehandedly defeat a squad of Destron henchmen before squaring off with a fierce, episodic guest monster! In the favor of the later programs, like KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX are an abundance of superb, high-tech FX! While the toned down battles lack half the fun of the down & dirty good old days, the latter programs offer a slick, glossy look, guaranteed to thrill fans of superheroes and sci-fi alike.

While not as internationally or commercially successful as the Sentais or Ultramen, the Kamen Riders are equally as important (if not more so). If you've never seen a Japanese superhero series, I suggest you view episode #1 of KAMEN RIDER (it's only available in Japanese, no Rider has ever been dubbed in English). It's a good intr o to the genre, and serves as the root (GOLDEN BAT & PRINCE OF SPACE are seeds!) to the complex family tree of Toei superheroes. Despite a few tips taken from granddaddies like Golden Bat and TBS's Ultraman, I'd say the whole scene officially starts with KAMEN RIDER, since things haven't been the same since it debuted over 25 years ago!!

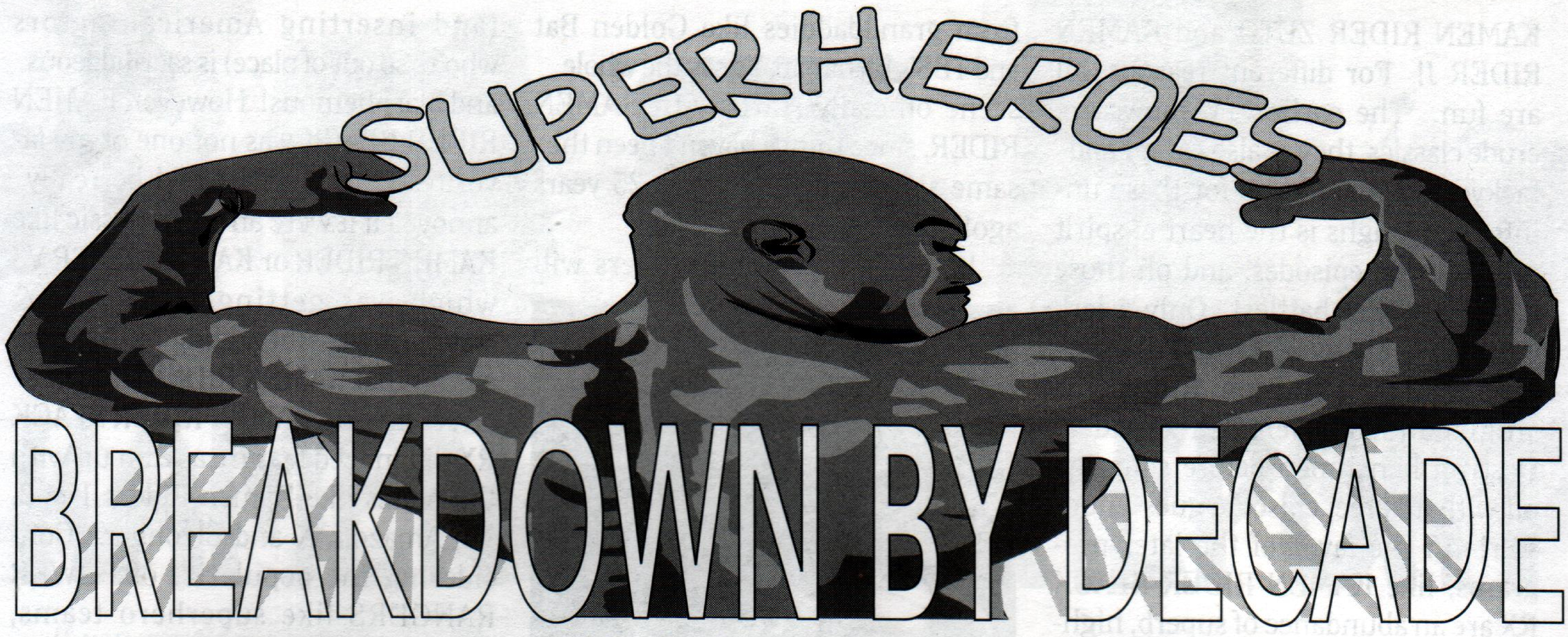
It seems the Kamen Riders will



make their long overdue debut on American TV this fall. I hear those notorious pioneers of superhero superceding, Saban Entertainment have bought the rights to the FX shots from KAMEN RIDER BLACK. While I didn't give a damn how Saban screwed up & bastardized ZYU RANGERS, SPIELVAN and METALDER, I feel tampering with an actual Kamen Rider series is an unholy act. The Kamen Riders were classics in their own right, so I can't help but consider chopping up one of these shows (and inserting American actors who're so out of place) is sacrilidgeous and blasphemous! However, KAMEN RIDER BLACK was not one of my favorites to begin with, I'd be really annoyed if it were an older classic like KAMEN RIDER or KAMEN RIDER V3 which was getting butchered & slaughtered. But adding to this concern is that KAMEN RIDER BLACK's direct link-up KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX did indeed feature a team up with the oldies like Kamen Riders 1 & 2, V3, Amazon, X and Stronger. Considering the popularity of POWER RANGERS-like superhero teams, could it be that Saban is also eyeing the Kamen Rider team-up episodes? Will famous heroes we've always known as Kamen Rider V3 and Kamen Rider X be given new American names to confuse matters all the more? That would be like somebody re-releasing Adam West's old BA TMAN show, and renaming the Caped Crusader, hoping the audience wouldn't know they've been had. Oh well, time will tell; will the Americanized KAMEN RIDER BLACK be a hit or a miss? In the case of both ZYU RANGERS and SPIELVAN, I think Saban actually improved over the original Japanese versions, but topping an authentic Kamen Rider series will be Saban's biggest challenge yet!

Ultra characters and ©TBS. Kamen Riders are ©Toei. Sentais are ©Toei.





BREAKDOWN BY DECADE

Finding out what the hell is the first superhero film [ever made] is like finding a needle in a hay factory. Part of the problem is there's really no true definition of a superhero. The first feature film ever made is believed to be the propaganda/adventure BIRTH OF A NATION, which featured (get this) the Ku Klux Klan as heroes, riding to the rescue, on their white horses to eliminate 'evil' blacks (played by whites in black makeup which would make Hal Jolson's makeup look unbelievably realistic) terrorizing a western town after the end of the civil war. But in the years that followed, less bigoted heroes appeared in more silent, B&W flicks. In 1903 came Korea's W AR-RIOR OF JUSTICE, which consisted largely of a live performance, but 'filmed' scenes were included for outdoor shots. There were numerous play/movie hybrids like this in Korea, called 'Kino Dramas'.

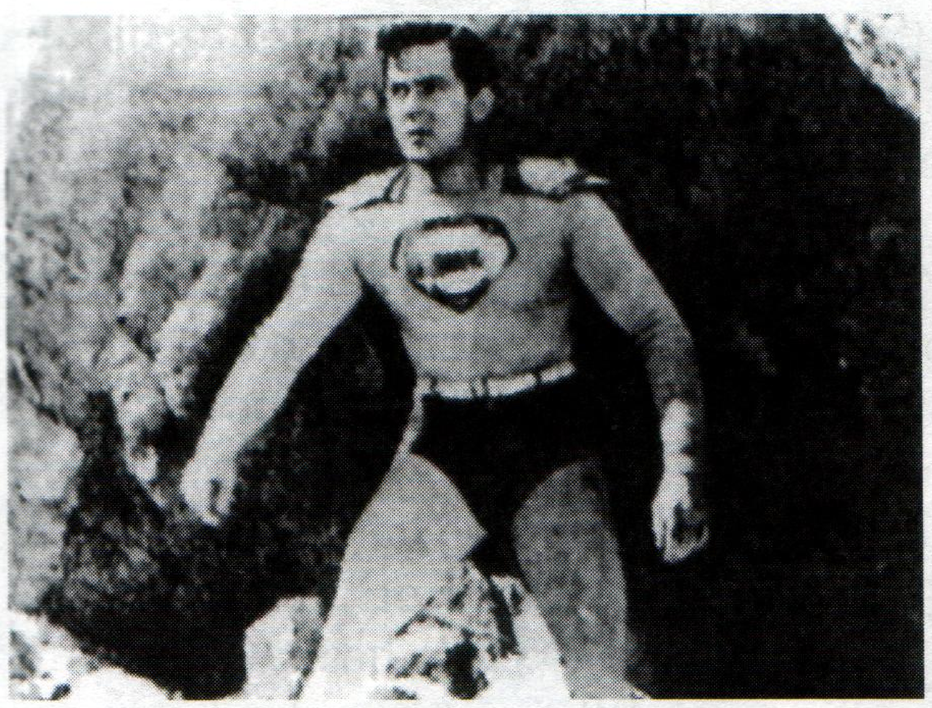
20's

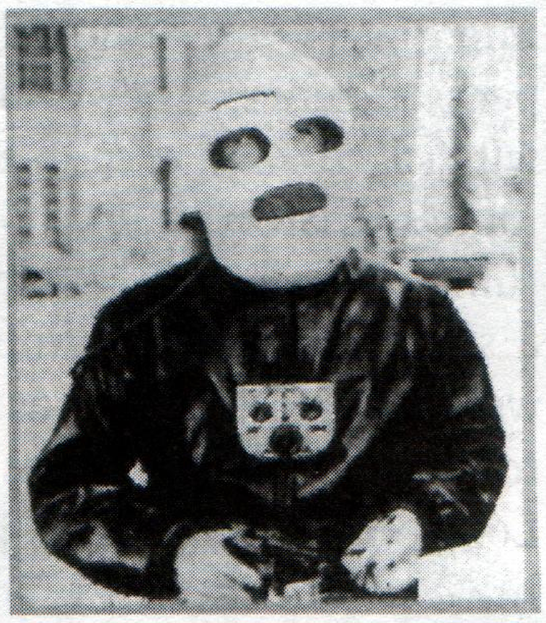
Until somebody proves me wrong (no major difficulty, it happens frequently), let's consider Italy's B&W silent film, CABIRIA (1924) to be the world's first super-hero film?! This was the first ever "Sword & Sandal" film, and starred Bartolomeo Pagano, who played the sword-wielding muscleman 'Maciste the Mighty'. Over the years, Pagano played the Roman do-gooder in thirty sequels. This inspirational film series ignited the many Italian 'Sword & Sandal' films about Hercules, Goliath, Ulysses, & Theseus which came out in probably every decade ever since. If these Sword & Sandal flicks are a type of superhero film, then so are westerns dealing with characters like the Lone Ranger & Zoro, characters of which I'm reserving for future articles. For the duration of this article, I won't mention the continuing Sword & Sandal films (that too will be looked at much later), but only mentioned CABIRIA for its historical importance.

Perhaps another pre-superhero film, which also may not fit into the superhero category as we know it today, was the Chinese stageplay MAN FROM SHENSI, originally written by Runjy Shaw (a Shaw Brother) as a play, and later adapted to be a silent, B&W film in 1924. Later came MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD, from 1926. Based on Wu Cheng En's classic novel ("Jour ney to the West") fr om the 13th century, the B&W, silent drama told of the Monkey King, undoubtedly the world's oldest superhero. While I've not seen MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD or MAN FROM SHENSI, it's a sur e bet that it's the usual Peking opera-type stuff; dancing, over acted artificiality, and some acrobatics. Fortunately, there would be literally hundreds of Monkey King movies and TV shows to come out later on, once people knew how to do special effects. But period flicks like MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD, MAN FROM SHENSI and Italy's CABIRIA (not to mention other oldies about Robin Hood or the Thief of Bagdad), are straying a little too far from this magazine's subject matter, or are they? There's really no fine line between adventurer and superhero.

30's

In the 1930s, superheroes of radio and comics were adapted to movies and/or serials. Unfortunately, info on exactly which super-





SUPERMAN (KIRK ALYN)
ROCKETMAN

heroes made it to film is hard to come by. BLACKHAWK? CAPTAIN AMERICA? CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT? MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN? THE PHANTOM? THE SHADOW? SPY SMASHER? VIGILANTE? These are names I've heard, and believe are among the earliest of America's live action super heroes, but have never seen them-- nor can I positively confirm they actually came out in the 1930s. Supposedly, they're among the earliest, and since the 1930s were when all the comic & radio heroes appeared in celluloid, it's not a far -fetched theory. Corrections & additions are welcome from experts and Mr. Know-It-Alls willing to set the record straight, and write us the definitive article.

If nothing else, the 1930s offered important comics which would later appear on the silver screen. From American heroes like Batman and Superman, to Japan's THE GOLDEN BAT ("Ogon Bato"), T akeo Nagamatsu's 1930 manga, the 1930s offered the roots of what would later become important heroes of the screen.

40's

Ah yes, this is when it definitely, certainly, really really happened! The new superheroes were still in B&W, but at least now they had voices and something remotely similar to budgets.

Max Fleischer's SUPERMAN car - toon shorts came out in 1941, but Kirk Alyn wouldn't get the role as the first ever live action Superman until 1948. By this time, there had already been the first BATMAN serial, in 1943 (it's sequel series, BATMAN AND ROBIN hit theaters in 1949). Amazingly, these then-successful serials occasionally still played matinees when I was a twerp in the 1970s. I'd catch old serials like this (and FLASH GORDON, CRIMSON GHOST, BUCK ROGERS, CRASH CORRIGAN, KING OF THE ROCKETMEN, ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE, ZORO'S FIGHTING LEGION, etc.) at Saturday afternoon Godzilla film festivals, & often even on TV, and found the Supermen serials (1948's SUPERMAN and 1950's SUPERMAN VS. ATOM MAN) to be kinda' crude & lame, but with more thrills than the 1950s SUPERMAN TV show.

The BATMAN serial offered some chuckles, the action was swift and, filmed during (and taking place during) WW2, Batman frequently called his nemesis a "lousy Jap"! Not quite BIRTH OF A NATION, but a racist Batman is hilarious. Naturally, there was also a crude, B&W GREEN HORNET serial, with a young Keye Luke as Kato, but you were lucky to see even a quick karate-chop to the back of the neck.

50's

The pace was officially set for superheroes in the 1950s, thanks to that electric upstart, TV. Most superheroes now came from outerspace, thanks to the 104-episode series THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN, which ran from 1953 until 1957 (but still survives in repeats today). George Reeves now played the man of steel, and was the first time we got to see him both



GEORGE REEVES
AS SUPERMAN

live action and in color (only the first two seasons were B&W). Though remembered fondly by fans, I personally think it sucked when compared to Kirk Alyn's 1940s serials, which at least had a little action. THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN was unbelievably tame, Superman rarely punched a crook, instead letting them run into walls and each other, basically knocking themselves out. Superman's flying FX wer e fairly convincing, but the remainder was dull; lighthearted, non-ambitious scripts and a lackluster atmosphere. Sadly, two years after the show's demise, George Reeves shot himself dead, apparently depressed that he'd been typecast as Superman, and couldn't get any new acting jobs.

While THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN put audiences to sleep faster than a speeding bullet, those Japanese over in Japan came out with their own adaptation (or successor, in my opinion), Starman! Though originally called Super Giant in Japanese (a stupid name, as he's no giant, though his jock strap made part of his anatomy look giant), the Starman serials lasted from 1957 to 1959, and would later be edited into four feature length movies for American release, titled EVIL BRAIN FROM OUTERSPACE, ATOMIC RULERS OF THE WORLD, ATTACK FROM SPACE, and INVADERS FROM SPACE. But these Starman flicks were far more original than the 'Superman ripoffs' they were labeled as. These four exciting movies may come off as cheap & crude by America's cur rent (or even 1950s) standards, but what they offer historically is very important, they were a groundbreaking, important contribution to the superhero genre. They dealt heavily with space travel & sci-fi elements, more so than previous superheroes (unless you consider Flash Gordon a superhero). More importantly were the epic fist fights, as Starman took on dozens of villains at once! Long, drawn-out battles [combining acrobatics and judo] never hinted at in any Superman snoreathon. Starman was the first live action Japanese superhero (excluding samurais & ninja folk heroes), and remains a classic today. There were even Starman ripoffs (NATIONAL KID, INVASION OF THE NEPTUNE MEN, PRINCE OF SPACE, and GEKKO KAMEN) from Toei, who'd later per fect the art of Japanese superhero making.

Returning to America, there were TV shows like a live BUCK ROGERS (ABC; 1950), CAPTAIN VIDEO (DuMont; 1949), CAPTAIN ZERO (syndicated; 1955), COMMANDER CODY (NBC; 1955), FLASH GORDON (DuMont; 1951), CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT (syndicated; 1953), ROD BROWN OF THE ROCKET RANGERS (CBS; 1953), and ROCKY JONES- SPACE RANGER (syndicated; 1953). I wasn't around in the 1950s, and since none of these are currently repeated or available on prerecord, reviewing them is impossible. But again, in time, this publication hopes to go indepth on all this stuff, so long as it's not me writing it!

Down in Mexico, a new type of superhero was about to debut. Wrestling (or "Lucha Libr e", as them Mexicans down in Mexico call it) had been a popular sport south of the border for quite some time, but the first Mexican wrestling movie was 1952's LA BESTIA MAGNIFICA, by Producciones Hidalgo, and starred wrestler turned actor Wolf Ruvinski and Crox Alvarado. A tale of two wrestling brothers training night & day to by the champ, but how one turns to crime and the other to righteousness. It was quite popular, and turned its two stars into huge commodities. Hot on LA BESTIA MAGNIFICA's heals HURACAN RAMIRES (1952), about a heroic wrestler of the same name. Well not exactly, the actual, real-life wrestler sold the rights to Cinematografica Roma to use his name & mask for the eight movies (a 30 year run!). 1952 also saw the release of the film EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA, featuring the wrestler Medico Asesino, who wore a mask closely resembling Santo's (all silver), so some people thought this was Santo's first movie. So he later changed his mask to white.

By the late 1950s, wrestling adventures were big stuff in Mexico. LA SOMBRA VENGADORA (1954) featured the wrestler Fernando Oses. His costume was similar to today's wr estler El Rayo de Jalisco. His character was a creation of Producciones Manrique. He appeared in nine films in a period of six years. He started out playing a non-wrestling hero in sci-fi westerns, but in his last two films he did indeed wrestle. Fernando Oses is a real wrestler, but never wrestled in the ring as La Sombra. But he did give permission to another wrestler who did wrestle under that name. 1957 saw a whopping ten (more than any other year) wrestling movies, including the Aztec Mummy's debut in LA MOMIA AZTECA, and later that year in

CIRE films

3 SUPERHOMBRES

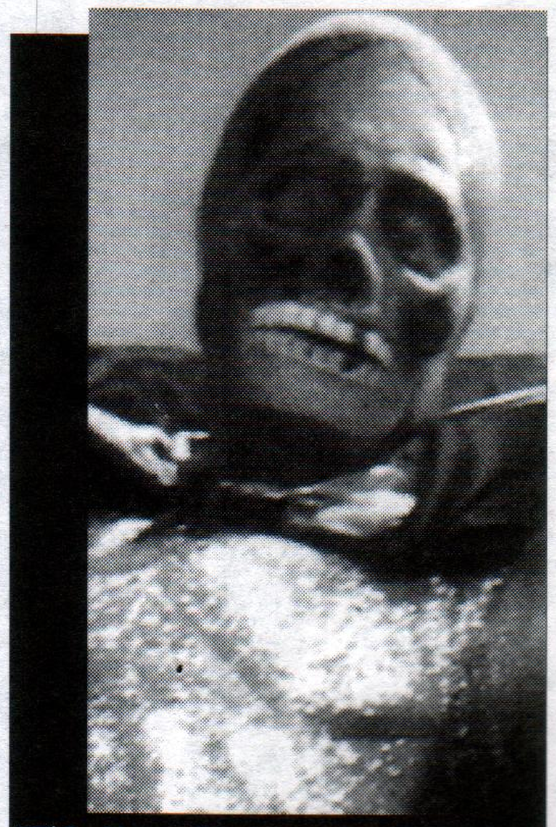
PANORAMICA
EASTMANCOLOR

TONY KENDALL
BRAD HARRIS
NICK JORDAN

BETTINA - JOSEPH MATTEWS - PATRICIA CARR
CHARLES TAMBLIN - TONY LANCASTER CON

GLORIA PAUL

DIRECTOR: **FRANK KRAMER**



IT'S JAPAN'S GOLDEN BAT, THE GREATEST, MOST RIGHTEOUS SKELETON OF 1966!

RAFEAL PORTILLO'S MALDICIONS DE LA MOMIA AZTECA. Last but not least was the debut of El Santo in EL SANTO CONTRA EL CEREBRO DEL MAL (1958), which blew away the earlier ones, and catapulted Santo to cinematic history.

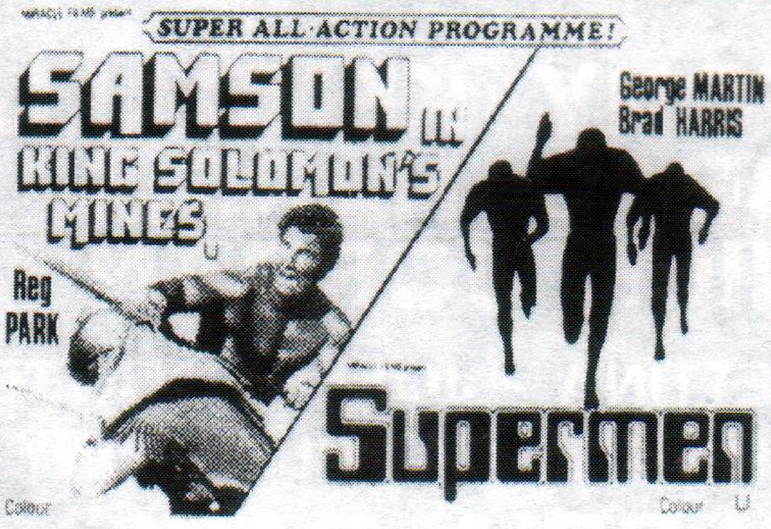
60's

Though Far East treats like ULTRAMAN, GOLDEN BAT and GEKKO KAMEN were nothing to take even semi-lightly, me still thinks it was the productions of us round-eyes which really stood out! So I believe the 1960s were the "Golden Age of Caucasian Superheroes"! Even so, part of the fun in American superheroes was the work of an Asian, the one and only Bruce Lee as Kato in THE GREEN HORNET. Without Bruce's unsurpassable kung fu kicks, THE GREEN HORNET would lack even half the excitement of its sister series, BATMAN. But what both programs proved was that the boring old days of people yelling, "It's a bird, it's a plane", etc. had died like snails in a salt factory! The 1960s were far more exciting times! BATMAN and GREEN HORNET came out when we yankees finally found out about martial arts (okay, so judo & jujitsu were practiced by Americans in the 1940s & 1950s, but this never affected movies), and spy/secret agent flicks were also big in the 1960s. While Batman's fighting technique was more boxing than martial arts, the idea of a single guy (or two, if you count Robin) beating up several villains at once in a fast paced battle is big fun, no matter how cheesy it's done. The gadgets & gimmicks of these shows also showed that the 1960s heroes had come a long way; from the Green Hornet's Black Beauty (a hearse-like car) and 'Hornet Sting' (a cane which fired gas and opened locked doors), to Batman's Batmobile & Utility Belt, high tech weapons added more intrigue and a sense of invincibility.

Neutron is one of the best known



LEFT: 2 OF THE 3 FANTASTIC SUPERMEN IN A COMIC BASED ON THEIR FILMS. BELOW: A DOUBLE BILL IN BRITAIN, WHERE THE 3 SUPERMEN IN THE JUNGLE WAS RELEASED AS SIMPLY "SUPERMEN".





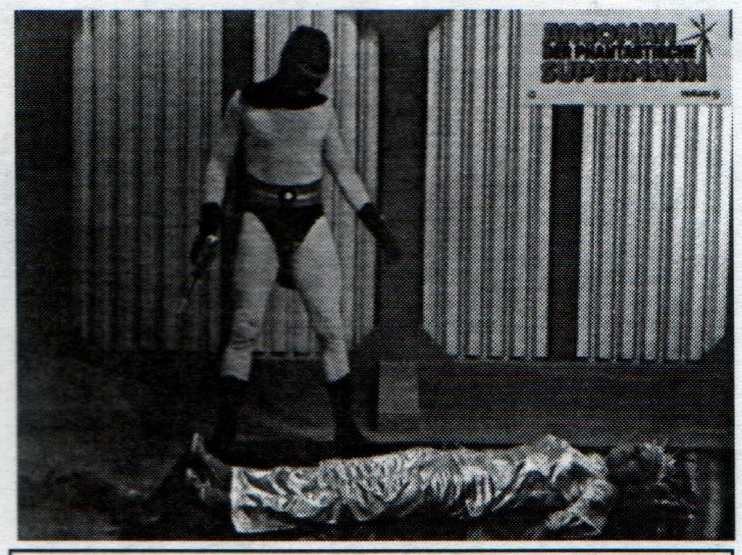
ABOVE: BATMAN AND ROBIN BATTLE A SLEW OF VILLAINS.
LEFT: BATGIRL HELPED SPICE UP THE BATMAN SERIES.

of Mexico's wr estling stars from the 1960s. He had six films dubbed into English, which is more than Santo got. Neutron was a masked hero, and not really a true wrestler. He was played by the wrestler-turned-actor Wolf Ruvinski, who's now the Mexican Wrestlers Association president, and no longer does films. Neutron's first film was NEUTRON ENMASCARADO NEGRA (1960). In 1962 we saw the rise and fall of another masked wrestler called Tormenta (storm), who never wrestled in the ring and was in only two films: SENOR TORMENTA and TORMENTA EL RING. But the shortest film career of any wrestler has to be that of La Sombra Blanca, in the 1964 film ASESINO INVISABLE, featuring the character Enmascarado de Oro, in his first & last film. To add insult to injury, the English dubbed version had him dubbed, "Neutron"! A bizarre two film series made in 1964 was ENDEMONIADOS DEL RING and MANO QUE APRIETA. The two heroes' costumes were that of an angel and a devil. This team was probably the forerunner of the team ups like Santo & Blue Demon. Speaking of which, the Blue Demon's series of adventur es started in the 1960s, and were second only to those of El Santo.

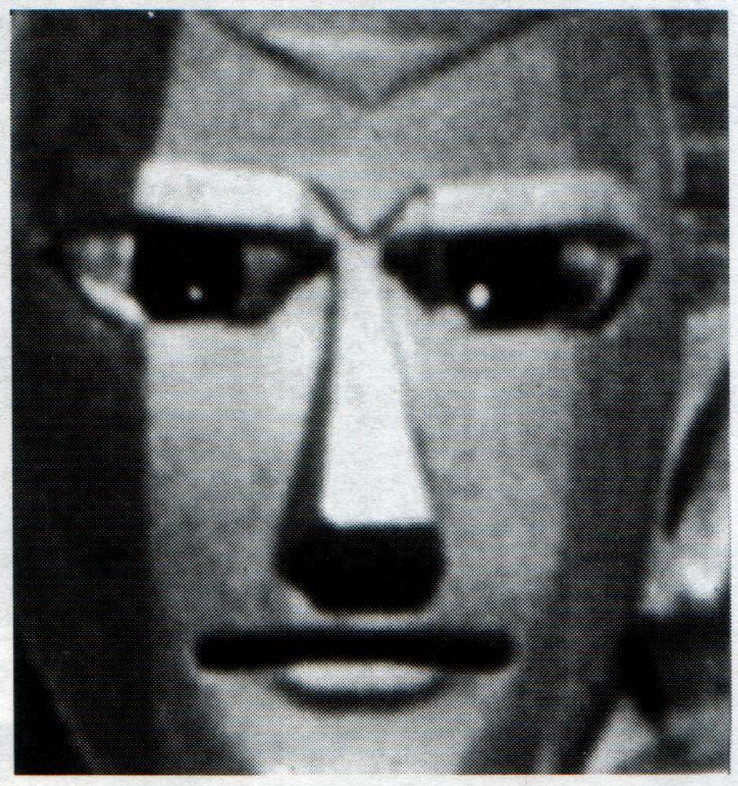
El Santo's Mexican movies wer e successful enough in Italy to inspire two decent movies about the wrestler Super Argo, who bears a striking resemblance to the hero in the 1980s U.S. series THE FLASH. In fact, Italy is where the fun really starts! In my opinion, the successor to SUPERARGO was 1967's THE THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN! Influenced not only by Santo, but BATMAN & GREEN HORNET too, these guys pack in a hell of a lot more punch than Clark Kent ever did! The first two films are full of acrobatics and karate-inspired skirmishes, and are way ahead of their times! During the course of this seven-part film series (the last in 1986), the three heroes took on mad scientists, Russian spies, cowboys, samurais, cannibals, gangsters, secret agents, Chinese kung fu masters and who knows what else?! Unlike SUPERARGO and Mexico's El Santo, the humor in the "3 Supermen" films is intentional, it's all meant to be funny. There were equally campy films out of Italy too, though some are more 'secret agent' and/or 'master criminal' type stuff. The separation between these spy capers and superhero movies gets quite blurry. The 3 Supermen & other Italian heroes sometimes used fancy, high-tech gadgets (somewhere inbetween James Bond devices and those on Batman's utility belt),



VAN WILLIAMS & BRUCE LEE
IN THE GREEN HORNET



ABOVE: A SCENE FROM ITALY'S ARGOMAN (1967). BELOW: TIGHT CLOSE UP OF GIANT ROBOT, THE HERO FROM 1967'S JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT.



THE THUNDERBIRDS LEGACY!
GERRY AND SILVIA ANDERSON'S AMUSING GENRE OF MARIONETTE PROGRAMS INCLUDED NOT ONLY THUNDERBIRDS, BUT CAPTAIN SCARLET, STINGRAY, JOE 90 AND FIREBALL XL-5.

which occasionally lumped the hero flicks in with the spy genre. In fact, possibly the first Italian superhero movie, Umberto Lenzi's KRIMINAL (1966) was very much influenced by the spy stuff. Other 1960s heroes in Italy included movies like PHENOMENAL AND THE TREASURE OF TUTANKAMEN (Rugerro Deodato; 1967), FLASHMAN (1967, not to be confused with the Japanese show of the same name), and 1968's SA TANIK. Also worth checking out is an amusing wrestling hero called GOLDFACE, THE FANTASTIC SUPERMAN.



GOLDAR IN SPACE GIANTS.

It has been rumored that 1966 saw the release of FLYING MAN, a superhero movie from India! Equally bizarre is that this elusive film features stock footage from GORGO, an old British monster movie. Supposedly, India has their own movie, SUPERMAN, obviously a blatant ripoff of our own character.

Back to Japan! Like I said, ULTRAMAN (TBS; 1966) is truly a groundbreaking classic, but not my personal favorite. It lacked the action & pacing of the Italy's 3 Supermen farces and our own GREEN HORNET series, but made up for it with heavy

ELECTRA WOMAN AND DYNA GIRL OF THE KROFT SUPER SHOW (ABC: 1976)



elements of sci-fi and Godzillian FX. It proved to be Japan's first really influential superhero series, even though SPACE GIANTS (aka "Goldar", and "Magumi T aishi") had a head start; it came out a few months before ULTRAMAN! But what these two influential Japanese programs proved is that, like in America, Italy and Mexico, full color excitement & amusement were the high point of international superheroism. No longer were people content to watch Clark Kent talk his way through slow-paced, lackluster dramas. The whole world seems to agree that the 1960s saw major improvements in superheroism.



The popularity of Mexican wrestling movies declined. The Italians were still making superhero films (i.e. 1974's SUPER STOOGES VS. THE WONDER WOMEN and 1979's THE PUMA MAN & SUPERSONIC MAN), but they got poor distribution. However, it's r umored that Turkey, of all places, came out with movies like 3 DEV ADAM, and 1972's SUPER ADAM. Info on these (i.e. whether or not they actually exist) is scarce. One of America's better attempts was the ABC series from 1975, WONDER WOMAN (the show was campy, but the high point was Linda Carter's gor geous physique), but then, anything looked good compared to dull dreck like THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN (ABC; 1973) and THE BIONIC WOMAN (ABC; 1976)! No, I take that back. Remember Saturday morning kiddie garbage like SHAZAM! (CBS; 1975), ISIS (CBS; 1975), and Sid & Marty Kroft's ELECTRA WOMAN AND DYNA GIRL (ABC; 1976)? Okay, so Filmation, Sid & Marty Kroft etc. were probably avoiding censors who whine about violence on children's TV , as political correctness began showing its ugly head. Gone were the days of Kato's kung fu kicks, English-dubbed Ultraman chopping of Red King's head, or Adam W est punching The Riddler into unconsciousness. American parents wanted positive role models, education and constructive morals for the kiddies, resulting in Captain Marvel (on SHAZAM!) telling us to look both ways before crossing the street. These tame, goody two-shoes heroes made the 1950s Superman (George Reeves) seem like a real butt kicker! I'm not condemning positive morals for kids, but the focus of this magazine is action, not telling boys & girls

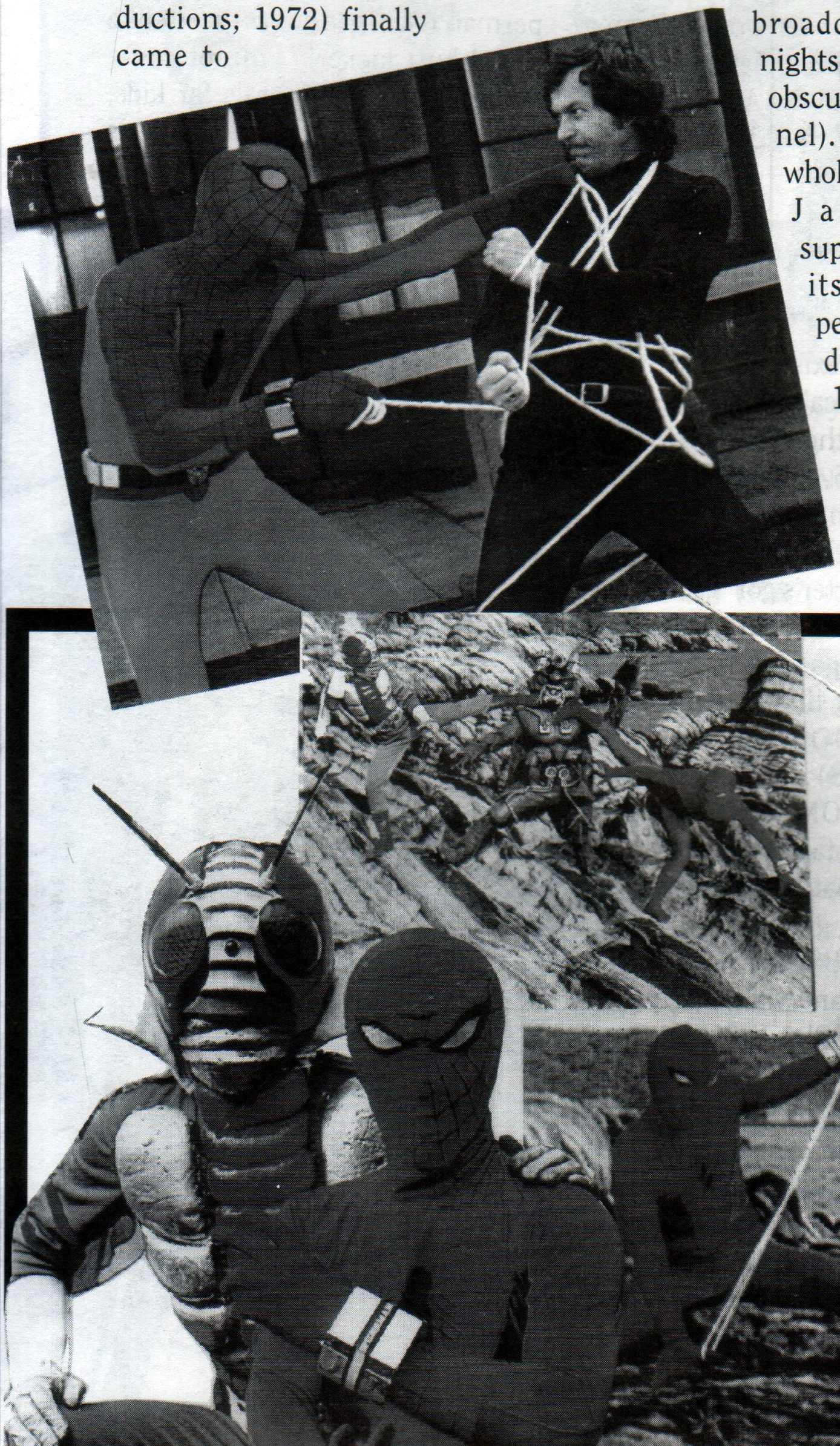


things (i.e. common sense) their parents should have told them.

I was still a twerp in the 1970s, and as such, lived for old BATMAN & ULTRAMAN repeats (when I could find them), while tolerating the clean, wholesome ELECTRA WOMAN & DYNA GIRL. Christopher Reeve's SUPERMEN movies weren't much better .

But when Japan's immensely entertaining SPECTREMAN (P Productions; 1972) finally came to America, I realized what I really needed was more Asian heroes. I scoured San Fransissy's many for - eign outlets; theaters, bookstores, and TV stations. When I saw KIKAIDER (aka KIKAIDA, and KIKAIDER- THE ANDROID OF JUSTICE) on TV one fateful, future-altering day in 1976, me and other elementary school rebels & outcasts were hooked! It was in Japanese with English subtitles, broadcast Sunday nights on Fuji TV (an obscure UHF channel). Suddenly, a whole new world of Japanese superheroism at its ultimate peak! Beyond a doubt, the 1970s were the Golden Age of Japanese Superheroes!!! We'd all been taught to be kind-hearted to our fellow-brats by Electra Woman, Jason of Star Command, 'Oh Mighty' Isis and Captain Marvel. But tolerating this whimpy stuff created pent up rage and a lust for the 1960s-style action, and them Japanese at Toei Co. were ready to give it to us- with a vengeance!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Younger Ultramen in programs like ULTRAMAN TARO (TBS; 1973) and ULTRAMAN LEO (TBS; 1974) were a sci-fi lover's dr eam come true, but the true superhero kings of the 1970s were the insect-faced Kamen Riders! Were it not for Kamen Riders 1 & 2, V3, X, Amazon, etc., there'd be no KIKAIDA brothers, DENZIN ZABOGA, INAZUMAN, ROBOT KEIJI K, AKUMAIZER 3, and of course, prominent Sentais like GORANGERS. Even the Chinese were getting in on it, with movies like INFRAMAN and SUPER RIDERS WITH THE DEVIL, To me,



1978 WAS A BUSY YEAR FOR MARVEL'S SPIDERMAN! WHILE APPREHENDING HOLLYWOOD KARATE EXPRET EMIL FARKAS IN THE CBS SERIES, HE WAS ALSO IN JAPAN AIDING KAMEN RIDER V3!

these 1970s movies & TV shows are the ultimate superhero masterpieces; fun, fast-paced, campy, FX-filled, ambitious, and full of pure, solid, uncensored, unapologetic karate violence! Naturally, any series with this much fighting was too much for American TV, children's or otherwise. Personally, I can't think of anything I'd rather watch than a Japanese superhero series from the 1970s.

But getting back to superheroes in America (sort of), if there's one USA hero who dominated TV in the 1970s, it would have to be Marvel Comic's agile web-spinner himself, Spiderman. Though the ratings of this late 1970s series failed compared to the late Bill Bixby's INCREDIBLE HULK (CBS; 1978) show, Spiderman himself battled baddies on both sides of the globe! Aside from his five minute skits as "Spidey" on the childish educational series THE ELECTRIC COMPANY (PBS), where he took on criminals and bad grammar, he starred in two very different shows, both called Spiderman. The American SPIDERMAN (CBS; 1977) was played by Nicholas Hammond. Though kinda' lame, it did feature a few decent fights (see THE CHINESE WEB, set in Hong Kong and edited from a couple of episodes). But even these brief spats were tame compared to the thrills of Japan's wacky SPIDERMAN (T oei; 1978) series. Toei Co., known for anything from JOHNNY SOKKO & HIS FLYING ROBOT to KAMEN RIDER to DYNAMAN, bought the rights from Marvel Comics to make a Japanese language series with Spiderman's name, costume, wall climbing and web firing ("Spider String", as he calls it)- and nothing else! No Peter Parker! No Mr. Jamison! This bastardized remake is anything but faithful to the original American comics & cartoons! Basically, a typically Japanese story of a superhero battling armies, monsters, aliens, cyborgs, spaceships and anything else which came to mind. Japan's Spider man is important historically, because of its giant robot Leo Paldan, who bridged the gap between Shogun Warriors and Transformers. Spiderman's r obot paved the way for more robots on Japanese TV, ultimately including (yes, you guessed it) the Zords in POWER RANGERS.



LEFT: SPECTREMAN ©P PRODUCTIONS
BELOW: 1970'S HERO CONDORMAN (RIGHT)



Adam West & Burt Ward had a brief comeback period, when they again put on their superhero uniforms. It was some sort of two part gameshow, wasn't it? How many of you other oldtimers have vague memories of this shot-on-video satire? Wasn't Batman the host, and Robin (now very acrobatic) was a contestant? Other contestants were different comicbook heroes and villains (maybe even Frank Gorshin as the Riddler?), who took part in some sort of trivia questionnaire. Who knows the full story behind this goofy show?

As mumbled at the beginning of this 1970s section, Mexican wrestling films were going down hill. However, they still existed, like those of real-life wrestler Tienmblis. He still wrestles today, as does his son. His first appearance was in the film CAMPEONES JUSTICIEROS. In his 13 year film career he was support to the likes of Mil Mascaras, Blue Demon and Santo. The next 1970s wrestler was Superzan, who was the creation of Producciones Filmacas Agrasanchaz. He started out as a superhero who battled space invaders, but later he became a real life wrestling star. He was one of the few wrestlers who went from the screen to the ring instead of the opposite. His first film was SUPERZAN EL INVINSEBLE (1971), and went on to star in six more films throughout the 1970s. Another of the throw-away heroes

was Fantasma Blanca. He was never more than a support character in any of the five films he was in. He was invented to replace Medico Asesino in the "Champions of Justice" series. El Rayo De Jalisco was a fairly popular real life wrestler, who got into films to replace another wrestler, the almost identical La Sombra Vengadora, after the first of the "Champions of Justice" flicks. In the wrestling world he was a big deal but on the screen, a nobody. He is only credited with three films in 1972. That same year, we saw the team of LEONES DEL RING, a two film series that in the first film featured mostly unmasked heroes. The second film LEONES DEL RING CONTRA LA COSA NOSTRA featured a team of three masked heroes. 1973 was the debut of a motorcycle riding team of LOS JAGUARS VS. EL INVASAROES MISTERIOSO and KARLA VS. LOST JAGUAREZ. They were actually an import from Columbia and only made the two films. And of course, Santo & Blue Demon team-ups were the most popular of that decade too.

80's

By this time, I'd given up on all American superheroes. I never could sit through an episode of THE FLASH or THE GREATEST AMERICAN SUPERHERO (except for an episode featuring a blonde female hero- she was a real knock out in more ways than one). Robotic TV heroes like CAPTAIN POWER & THE SOLDIERS OF THE FUTURE, and SUPER FORCE were remotely sufficient, but how many of you remember PHOTON?! Shot on video and very colorful, but more exciting than ELECTRA WOMAN AND DYNA GIRL and other 1970s losers. PHOTON looked like an early, pre-POWER RANGERS hybrid. A joint production between Japanese and American companies (it tried to combine the best of both worlds), about a team of heroic adventur-

ers who's motto was, "The Light Shines". The costumes were very Japanese-inspired, the main hero looked like Brandon Lee, and a beautiful actress was his assistant superheroine. It had stupidity alongside with amusing action & FX. Any info on this oddity would be appreciated!

Needless to say, 100% Japanese superheroes were still the best. SPACE SHERIFFs GAVAN, SHARIVAN, SHIDER, & JUSPION were great fun, as were Super Sentais like DENZIMAN, SUN VULCAN, GOGGLE V, and DYNAMAN. The FX were truly excellent, far more advanced than those in the 1970s, and oh those fights! Incredible choreography abounded, thanks to excellent stuntmen & martial artists. But by 1984, the same thing which ruined American heroes over ten years before was now happening in Tokyo. Irate parents decided not to let their kids watch oodles of punches & kicks, so the production companies & TV stations were forced to gradually fizzle out the fun & excitement. That's why the duels in BIOMAN, CHANGEMAN, KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX, METALDER, SPIELVAN, MASKMAN, BYKLOSSAR and TURBO RANGERS offer a gradual decline in stunts & fights. It was, ironically, during this decline that so many American fans & bootleggers got into Japanese language TV shows. Compared to PHOTON, THE FLASH and SUPERFORCE, the confrontations in SPIELVAN & JIRAIYA must be awesome spectacles, but fail to impress anyone who remembers uninhibited classics like KAI KETSU ZUBAT (Toei; 1977), SPACE SHERIFF GAVAN (Toei; 1982), and DENZIN ZABOGA (P Productions; 1974). Newer U.S. fans seem to eat up 1980s stuff like MASKMAN and FIVEMAN unaware that these are half-ass abominations compared to that of the 1970s and <u>early</u> 1980s.



THE HEROES OF CYBERCOP (TOHO; 1988)

To be fair, the limp-wristed 1980s programs, though they fail as superhero adventures, make excellent science fiction. A phenomenal abundance of special effects in each series make them sure bets for fans of sci-fi and fantasy. If you love pyrotechnics, monster costumes, miniatures & spaceships, you're really missing out if you've not seen BYCKLOSSAR, CYBERCOP, MASKMAN or BIOMAN.

No matter how bad Japan's heroes got, the Mexicans managed to top that ineptitude with boring, nearly actionless crap like 1980's SANCHO EL ENMASCARADO VS. DR. POCA COLA! A silly spin-off of a TV show. In 1981 we saw the film debut of Son of Santo in the film CHANCHO Y EL HIJO DEL SANTO VS. LOS VAMPIROS ASESINOS. But the official end was the subsequent release of the worst and most bizarre of Santo's films, LA FURIA DE LOS KARATEKAS (1982). It was re-released as LA PUNA DEL MUERTE, with added scenes using Santo's son posing as his father , and re-cut what they already had in an attempt to cash in on the death (heart attack) of Santo in 1984. Pretty much the last of the 1980s were the films with Santo's son, Hijo Del Santo. He was teamed up with Mil Mascaras in the 1988 film EL HIJO DEL SANTO EN FRONTERA SIN LEY 90's to be somewhat watchable.

The shit finally hit the fan; Japanese TV shows like ZYU RANGERS, GRIDMAN, SPIELVAN, and METALDER getting mutated into American ripoffs: POWER RANGERS, SUPER SAMURAI CYBER SQUAD and VR TROOPERS. This is not a case of direct translation & dubbing (ala' SPECTREMAN & ULTRAMAN), but the most deceitful editing since Sandy Frank spliced 7-Zark-7 into Japan's GATCHAMAN (Tatsunoko; 1972), resulting in the mid-1970s BATTLE OF THE PLANETS! The Japanese actors in ZYU RANGERS, etc., are



clipped out, and in come new shots of American replacements (I thought this type of racist deceit went out with Raymond Burr in GODZILLA). Ironically, the new American actors in programs like POWER RANGERS and VR TROOPERS play their parts well, and in a few cases, are even more limber & energetic than the original Japanese actors they replaced! If nothing else, Japanese superheroes, in one form or another, have finally returned to the American spotlight.

Part of the reason I'm so toler - ant of POWER RANGERS is because it's just about the most exciting thing on American TV. Other American superheroes of the 1990s include more NINJA TURTLE movies, more ROBOCOP movies, Michael Keaton's (now V al Kilmer's) BATMAN movies, THE MASK, GUYVER, METEORMAN, and BLANKMAN. All these films (and many more) will be reviewed in future issues of this publication (but hopefully not by me). As somebody who finds American superheroes to be as much fun as watching ice melt in slow motion, throughout the 1990s, I've tried sticking to Japanese heroes, as always. Unfortunately, the stagnation which crept in during the 1980s is far worse now. Though American kiddies now get to see Americanized Power Rangers get in decent skirmishes, it's now the Japanese fans who'r e up against political correctness; a complete reversal from the 1970s, when Japanese TV kicked butt while ours sucked it! Toei's 1990 pr oductions like SOLBRAIN, DAI RANGER, BLUE SWAT, KAKU RANGER, WINSPECTOR and JAN PERSON have never skimped on superb special effects, but as heroic adventures, they fall flat. Uninteresting characters, uninspiring exploits. The producers don't care, all they care about are toy sales now, overpriced dolls of these lame superheroes. Merchandising has always been a major part of children's TV, but Japan's cur rent programs amount to little more than Infomercials with scripts (and predictable, re-hashed ones at that).

With Japanese superheroes at an all-time low, what direction is a fan of Asian heroes to go in the 1990s? Two possible answers are the superhero flicks from Korea and the Philippines.

Korean superheroes- Though I first found out about Korean heroes back in the late 1980s, I didn't get



a chance to see films like SPARKMAN, the UREME farces, SUPER HONG GIL TONG, YONG GU AND THE GOLDEN BAT and THUNDER BIG MAN until this decade. Most of these films are new, and fairly good. A typical example is 1990's SP ARKMAN, which like so many Korean sci-fi movies, stars an infantile comedian called Shim Hyung Rei. The FX are crude compared to Japanese TV, obviously their main inspiration, and there's far more dialogue & clowning around than action. SPARKMAN and the other Korean films are noble attempts to imitate Japan's older heroes, and as such, offer a slight glimmer of fun. If they keep evolving in this direction, their superhero technology should reach Japan in a couple years, and if the Koreans maintain their trademark Tae Kwon Do kicks, expect big fun from Seoul in the distant future!!

Philippines- These guys make the worst movies I've ever seen, even many of their top 'blockbusters' are cheap and still shot on 8mm film!! SUPER MOUSE AND THE ROBO-RATS, the STARZAN movies, ALYAS BATMAN EN ROBIN, CAPTAIN BARBELL and SHEMAN-MISTRESS OF THE UNIVERSE, most are no budget satires from Regal Films, usually starring Filipino schlockmeister Joey De Leon. He and director Tony Y. Reyes have mastered a deceitful, profitable formula: Give the flick a superhero title, and show the hero (s) on movie posters & video rentals, but no costumes need to be shown until the middle or end of the movie! So what you get are long, slow paced comedy dramas with endless dialogue (useless if you don't understand Tagalog, despite the language's incorporating of many English words), a few cheap (and I mean cheap) FX, and if you're lucky, an amusing fight or two, though Joey De Leon has absolutely no athletic or fighting skills whatsoever. Despite stupidity & boredom, these wacky flicks have grown on me, I always check them out, and De Leon has become, much like Korea's equally ir ritating Shim Hyung Rei, one of those guys you love to hate! Or is it, hate to love? But like the Koreans, the Filipinos are slowly climbing out of the miserable junk they'r e known for, as proven by exceptional movies like DUGU NG PANDAY and DARNA ANG PAGBALIK. If these two thrillers are any indication, I'd say the Filipino movies will have their day.

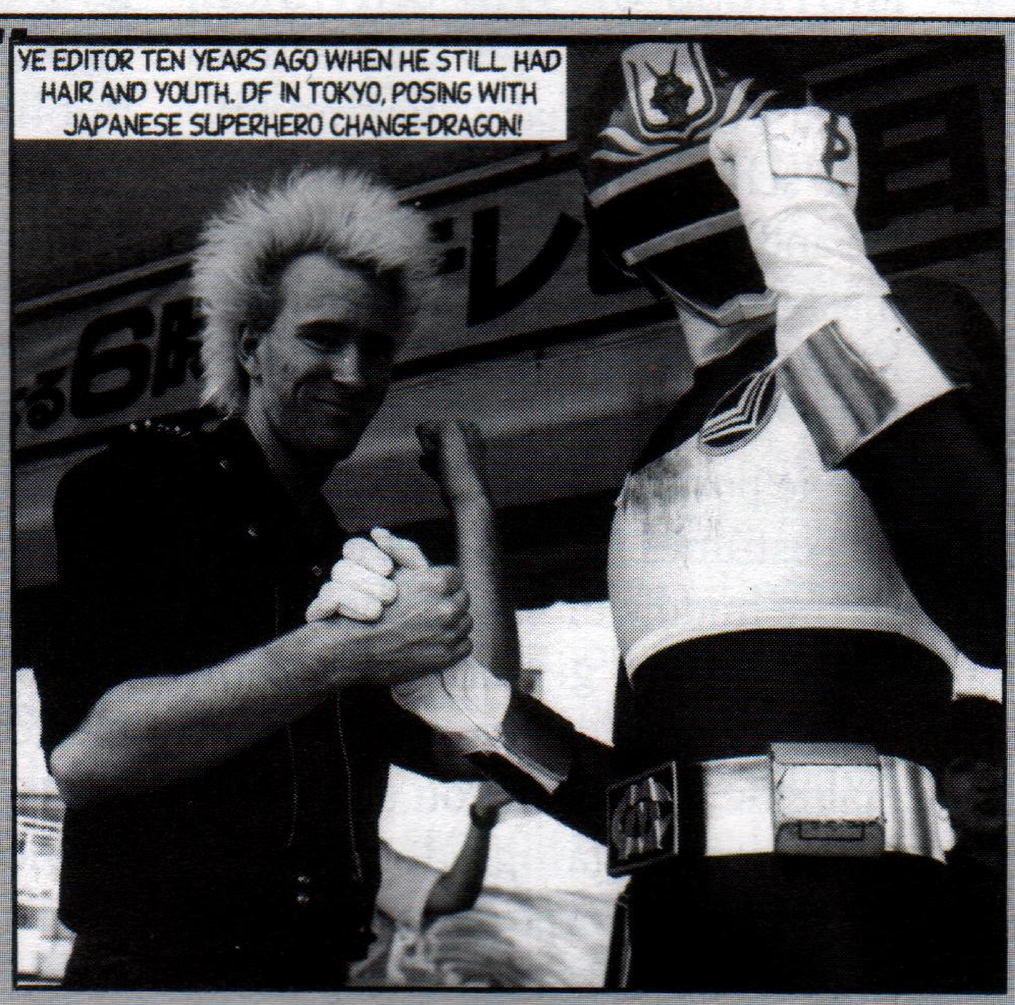
One company who, at this rate will never have its day is of course, Mexico. The 1990s did have a vague resurgence of interest in wrestling movies. This first was the 1992 flick LA REVANCHA, featuring two of today's top wr estlers: Atlantis and Octagon (who's also in LUCHA A MUERTE, see this issue's back



cover) in a story of drug smuggling and counterfeiting. In 1994 we saw the lame TV movie EL SANTO EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA, a story very loosely based on the death of Santo and rise of El Hijo Del Santo.

I hope you've enjoyed this vague overview, a general perspective on the century's superheroes. Naturally, I couldn't include everything, and I didn't mean to exclude anybody's favorite characters. Next issue, I hope to have a similar article, though from a different angle; a breakdown by country, not decade. This article was written through the eyes of an action fan, not a comic fan or cartoon fan. For this reason, I welcome new writers & experts willing to share their second (and third) opinions, their memories and trivia.

EDITORIAL CONT...



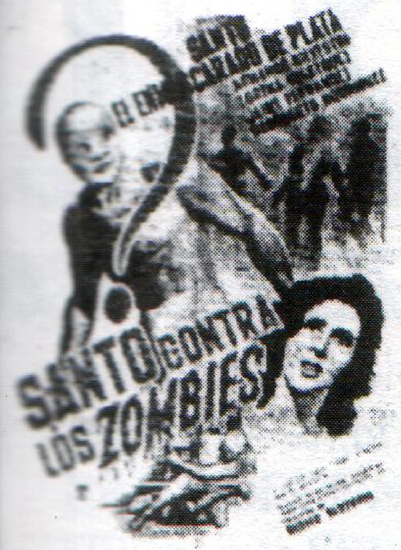
but the character wore some sort of elaborate skeleton costume. Anyway, the reason I'm mentioning these flicks is because I've not seen all of them yet, but hope to make everyone realize there's more to live action heroes than POWER RANGERS.

People familiar with my past work (who've probably forgiven me by now) know that my main field of expertise is Far Eastern heroes; movies and TV shows from Japan, China, and sometimes even Korea & the Philippines, when I can stomach them. Therefor, expect a heavy emphasis on the Asian stuff, much like my sixteen-year old magazine Oriental Cinema. But again, the topic is all live action superheroes, so expect plenty from Mexico, Europe and, I hate to say, the USA (snicker)! The goal of Heroes on Film is to do for live action heroes (not trendy cartoons & comics) what OC has done for the diverse world of Asian films. Try as I might, it became obvious that OC couldn't cover all the superhero programs out of Japan (there are literally thousands), there was no way to keep up. Because OC includes so many different topics (anything from samurais, to Hong Kong gambler movies to musicals from India), all its superhero-related material was confined to just one column, "Kaizo Ningen Update". But Heroes on Film is the super hero zine, there's a Kamen Rider column and an Ultra Brother column!

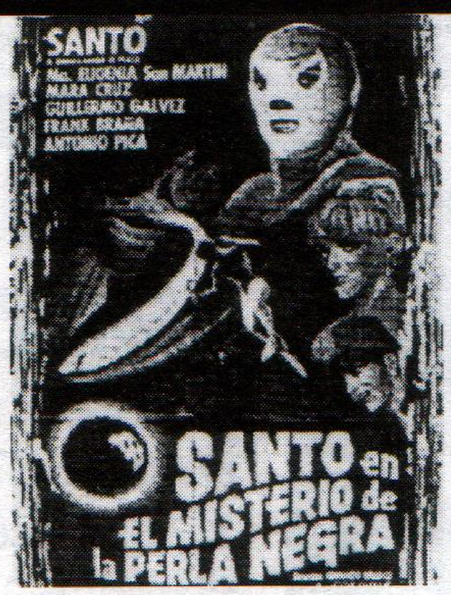
Naturally, doing this magazine, not to mention OC and my own amateur action/comedy videos consumes a lot of time, energy, money, effort, blood, sweat & tears. To complete this issue, I had to exhaust myself working 12 hours a day, plus an additional 12 at night. I'm spread out pretty thin, so any help from fans & writers would be appreciated. What I'm looking for are experts on certain genres, and of course, those who understand Japanese or other foreign languages. If you're Japanese, or just speak Japanese, or know somebody really helpful & nice who understands Japanese, we're begging for your help. I hope future issues of Heroes on Film will have complete episode guides of Japanese TV shows! We're looking for indepth probes and behind the scenes, and so far, all my regular translators are burned out, thanks to OC! So if you're Japanese or know somebody who's Japanese and are interested in helping a new, struggling magazine in trade for credit and free issues, I eagerly await your help!! The same applies to other languages & countries too, if the place has superhero movies & shows, we're interested! My address is: Damon Foster, P.O. Box 576, Fremont, CA 94537-0576. Don't confuse this address with that of my publisher in Illinois! I'm not in Illinois, just as Hugh Gallagher isn't in California.

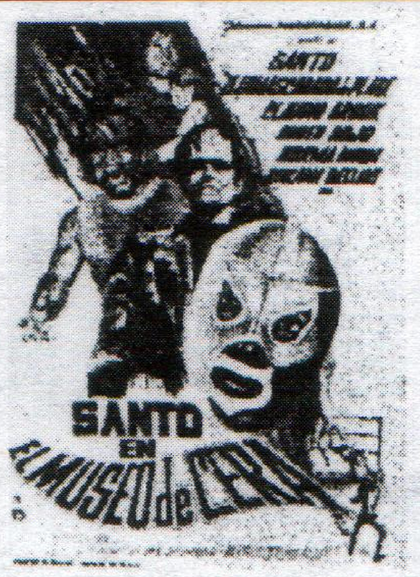
Now, I feel it's important that people realize this isn't yet another glossy, hyped-up magazine trying to ride the success of POWER RANGERS and V.R. TROOPERS. I will not waste space talking about the American actors and how they relate to their lame characters in the show. I'll not waste space with huge type & letters, nor will I treat people like idiots and pad everything out with boring, pointless plot synopsises. Unlike so many publications which feature the POWER RANGERS on their covers, this magazine is not packaged press material, only eager to get your money. HEROES ON FILM tells the truth, does research and offers honest, critical reviews. I'm not bowing down to American releasers, and have no interest in them. The goal of H.O.F. is to open people's minds, to take previously obscure movies & TV shows and make them known. No doubt this Fall, there will be more superhero rags out there, once Saban releases what I suspect are English edits of KAMEN RIDER BLACK and JIRAIYA.

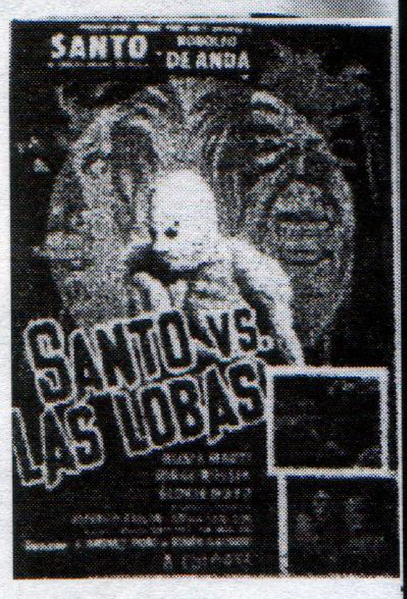
Damon Foster - editor


SANTO
EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA
SANTO contra los ZOMBIES


SANTO
CASANOVA
LEPE
MUERTE
SANTO

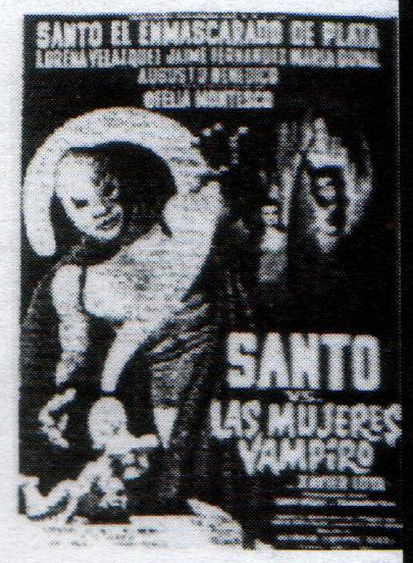

SANTO
SANTO en el MISTERIO de la PERLA NEGRA


SANTO
EN
EL MUSEO de CERA


SANTO
DE ANDA
SANTO VS. LAS LOBAS


SANTO
frente a la MUERTE

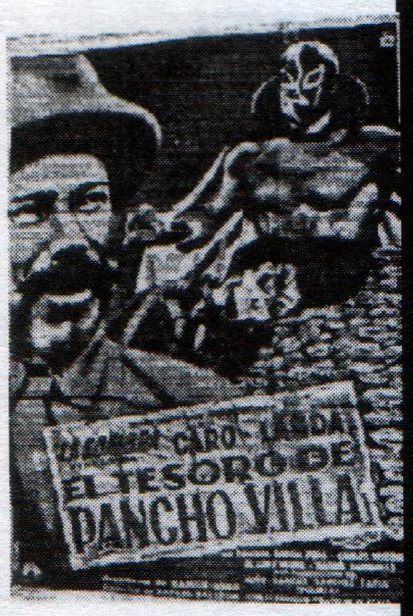

MAURO NICOLA PARENTI
LUCRETIA LOVE
GORDON MITCHELL
DIRECTED BY
ROGER ROCKFELLER
PHENOMANAL
ND THE TREASURE
OF TUTANKHAMEN
EASTMANCOLOR – WIDESCREEN


SANTO
EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA
SANTO
vs.
LAS MUJERES VAMPIRO

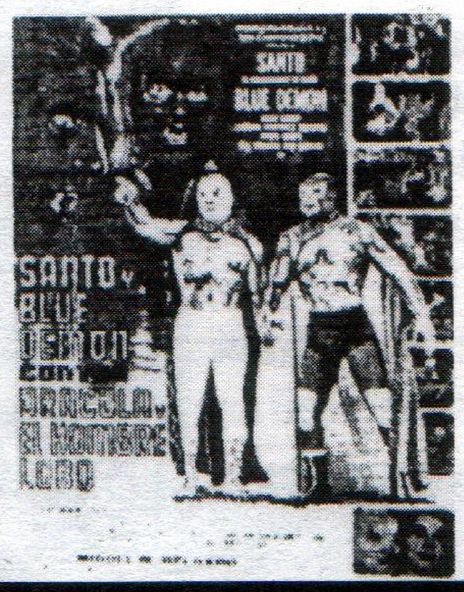

SANTO
vs.
LOS CAZADORES DE CABEZAS

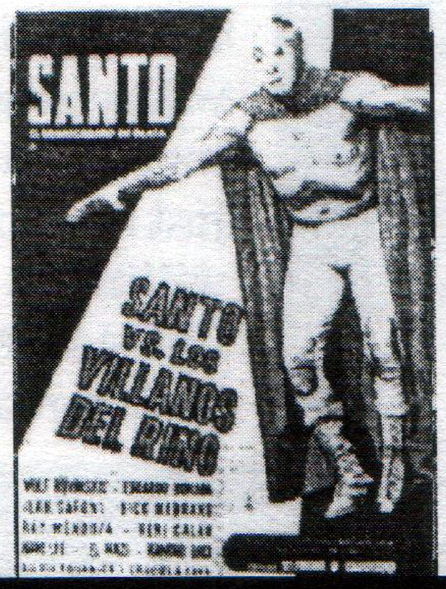

Armando SILVESTRE - Alicia CARO
Roberto LANDA
La SOMBRA VENGADORA


SILVESTRE
CARO
ROBERTO LANDA
LA SOMBRA VENGADORA
CONTRA
LA MANO NEGRA


SOMBRA CARO LANDA
EL TESORO DE
PANCHO VILLA




SANTO
BLUE DEMON
con
DRACULA
EL HOMBRE LOBO


SANTO
SANTO
vs. Los
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DEL RING

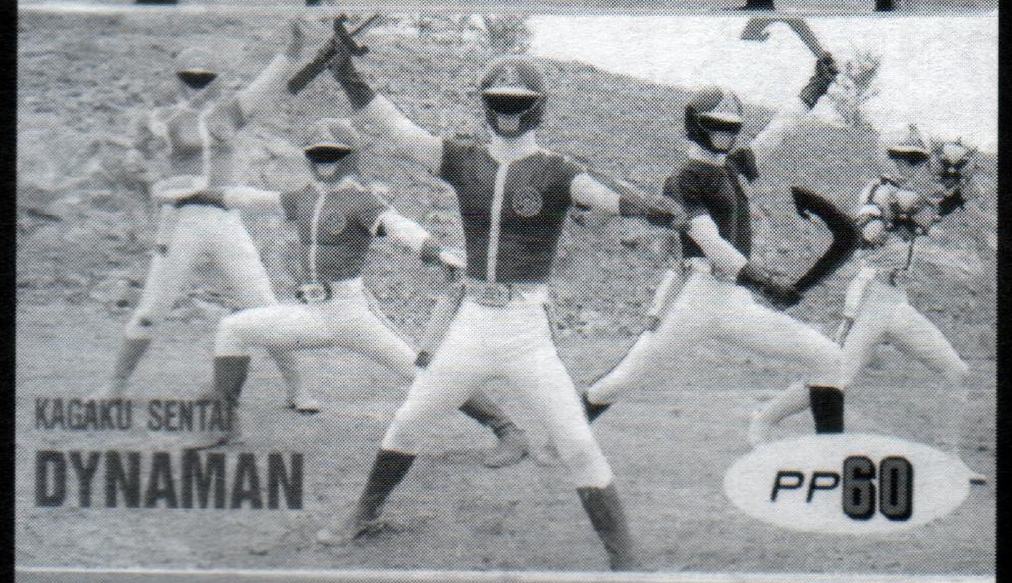

SANTO Y
MANTEQUILLA NAPOLES
LA VENGANZA DE
LA LLORONA


VIAJE A LA LUNA

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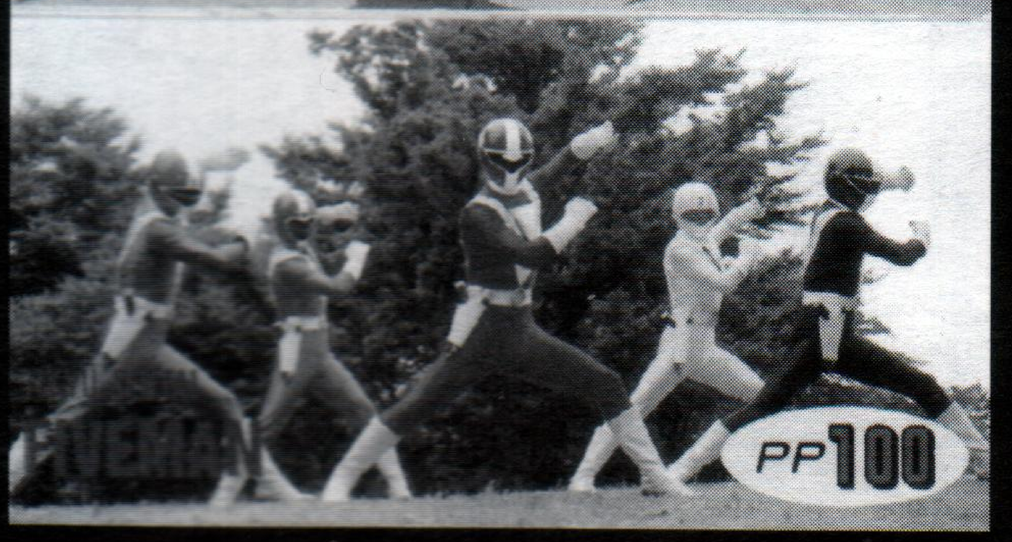












SENTAI

FROM GO-RANGERS TO

Only an absolute idiot, like those who call the Psychic Hotline or listen to Michael Bolton, doesn't know that the highly successful MIGHTY MORPHING POWER RANGERS (Saban; 1993) is a chopped up hybrid of Japan's series ZYU RANGER (Toei; 1992), and that it's also spliced in shots (i.e. the White Ranger) from DAI RANGER (Toei; 1993). But ZYU RANGERS itself is a ripoff of many other repetitious clones, called 'Sentai' (which means 'T ask Force', 'Superhero Team', etc.) in Japan. All these pr ograms and genres have been regularly covered in my other magazine ORIENTAL CINEMA, over the years, so writing this article will be easier than taking candy from a diabetic; I've memorized all this crap!

Regardless, the success of the bastardized POWER RANGERS in the U.S.A. proves that the kiddies of America have some degree of taste! After years of whimpy cartoons about Smurfs or turtles talking like surfers, here's a show which kicks butt! I realized this series would thrill American spoiled-bratdom during the summer of 1993, when the Fox Network broadcasted coming attractions featuring good, solid violence! A superhero giving a monster an honest, solid, spinning-back kick! No more half-ass action of some lame Batman cartoon! POWER RANGERS, compared to other American TV, is pretty damn exciting. For what it is, POWER RANGERS is quite worthwhile. However, as a longtime fan of Japanese superheroes in pure form (with original Japanese casts in-tact), I can't help but feel the original predecessors like GO RANGERS and DYNAMAN (virtually all the programs are from Toei Co.) deserve credit. Now you know why this wonderful column exists.

1974's HIMITSU SENTAI GO-RANGERS, which means "Secr et Task Force: Five Rangers" is the first traditional Sentai series, as we know them. It wasn't completely original though, and depending on just how analytical you're willing to get, GORANGERS may have been partially inspired by

SECTION

POWER RANGERS, AND BEYOND

anything from the Kamen Riders to 7 SAMURAI. Cartoon freaks (geeks) are quick to point out GORANGER's similarities to GATCHAMAN (U.S. titles: BATTLE OF THE PLANETS and G-FORCE), but I tend to compare it with early live action Sentai-like programs such as 1973's R YUSEI NINGEN ZONE (aka ZONE FIGHTER) series from Toho, and TRIPLE FIGHTER (TBS; 1971). In fact, Toho's TRIPLE FIGHTER series may be a major influence, and technically, it was the first of its type. But even before that was the B&W NINJA BUTAI GEKKO (English title: "Phantom Agents", as it appear ed in Australia & the Philippines), Toei's 1964 program about a team of pre-Sentai secret agents! Though supposedly dubbed in English, the odds of anyone finding these dubbed episodes is as likely as finding a penguin at the Sahara Desert.

So despite minor influences, the 84-part GORANGERS was very original for its time; five heroes (red, pink, green, blue & yellow) controlling a spaceship-like vehicle, motorcycles and magical weapons, and taking on unearthly creatures. To me, it's been a classic since I first saw it as a kid. It was broadcast on one of the local UHF channels, entirely in Japanese (no subtitles). It generated the same thrill to me & my schoolyard chums as the POWER RANGERS do today, to much younger generations. Of course, the language barrier was a deterrent for most of my classmates, but those of us who made it a point to watch it every Sunday night at 8:30PM (Primetime time-slot!) were automatically hooked!!! We overlooked the dirt cheap FX and badly designed villains (i.e. a walking telephone, marauding camera, etc.), because we loved the karate action and superb, charismatic, catchy, devastatingly appropriate, cool theme song! A fast beat, rock 'n roll-ish guitars colliding with militaristic horns! We'd never hear d of Karaoke, but would sing this song ("Ma kana T aiy-yo! Kamen Ni ukete! Negai-i Wa Hitotsu!") at school, much to the regret of 'nor - mal', irritated kiddies

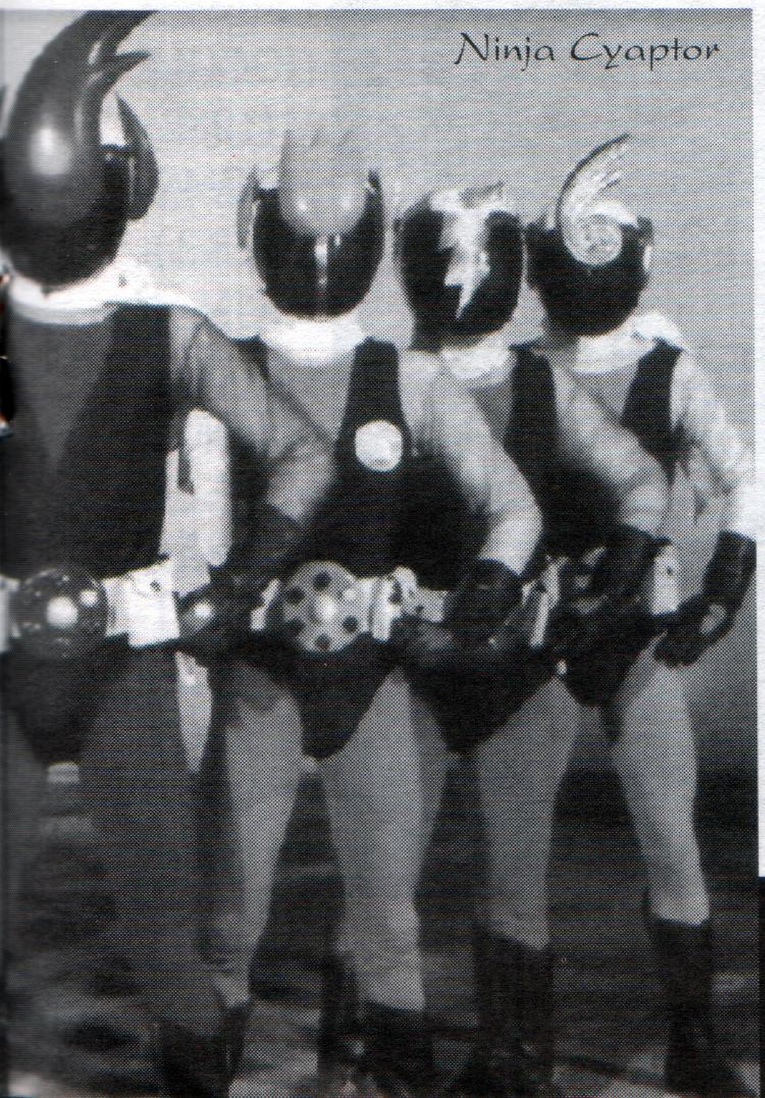


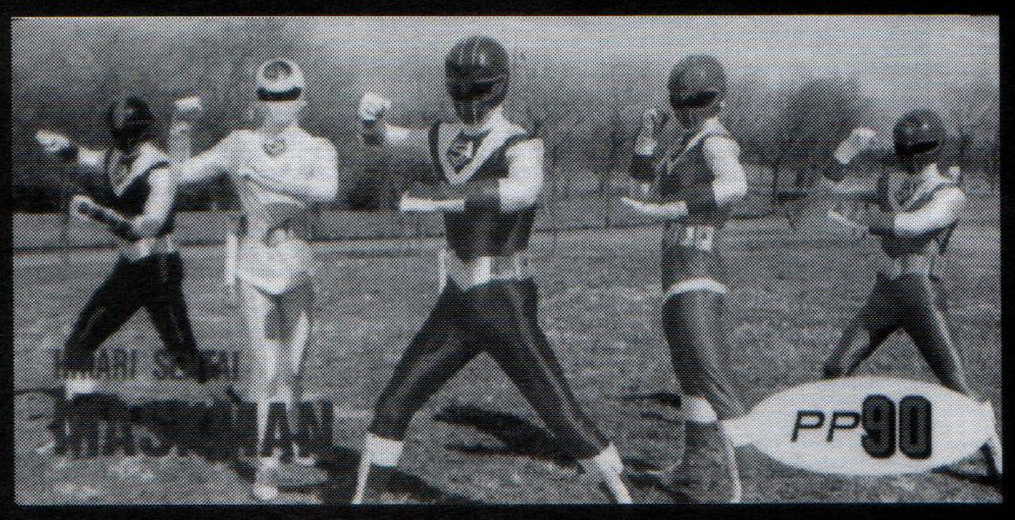
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around us. This was the 1970s, the program was still new. We considered ourselves hip and ahead of the times (today's POWER RANGERS fandom proves we were right), until irate parents complained about the mega dose of 'violence' we poor , misguided youths were getting from Fuji TV (then channel 20), every Sunday night. GORANGERS was taken off the air and replaced by some cartoon. I was furious that some <u>other</u> kids' over -protective parents, who obviously had a lot of time on their hands, would deprive <u>me</u> of the right to watch my favorite series.

Determined to keep in touch with Japan's Sentais, I lear ned how to use public transportation (I was still way too young to drive) to locate Japanese bookstores in my area. In the late 1970s, none of us had VCRs, so photos, record soundtracks and books were the next best thing. I got memorabilia on not only GORANGERS, but other teams of heroes which followed it: AKUMAIZER 3 (Toei; 1975), BIBYUN (Toei; 1976), BANKIDO (Toho; 1976), JACKERS (Toei; 1977), NINJA CAPTOR (Toei; 1976), and of course, the <u>highly</u> influential 1979 series from Toei, BATTLE FEVER J! All these 1970s programs were unique, each nearly a one-of-a-kind series. They all had similar scripts, martial arts and improving FX (they continue to get a little better each year), but each program was basically independent of the rest. Yet all were very exciting, I never really outgrew them.

So what the hell happened? Starting with 1980, the Sentai teams took a turn for the overly repetitious. Before they were similar, now they're identical. Now called <u>"Super</u> Sentai", the differences between Toei programs like DENZIMAN (1980), SUN VULCAN (1981), GOGGLE V (1982), DYNAMAN (1983), BIOMAN (1984), CHANGEMAN (1985), FLASHMAN (1986), MASKMAN







1. BIBYUN
2. GOGGLE V
3. LIVEMAN
4. BATTLE HAWK
5. TURBO RANGER

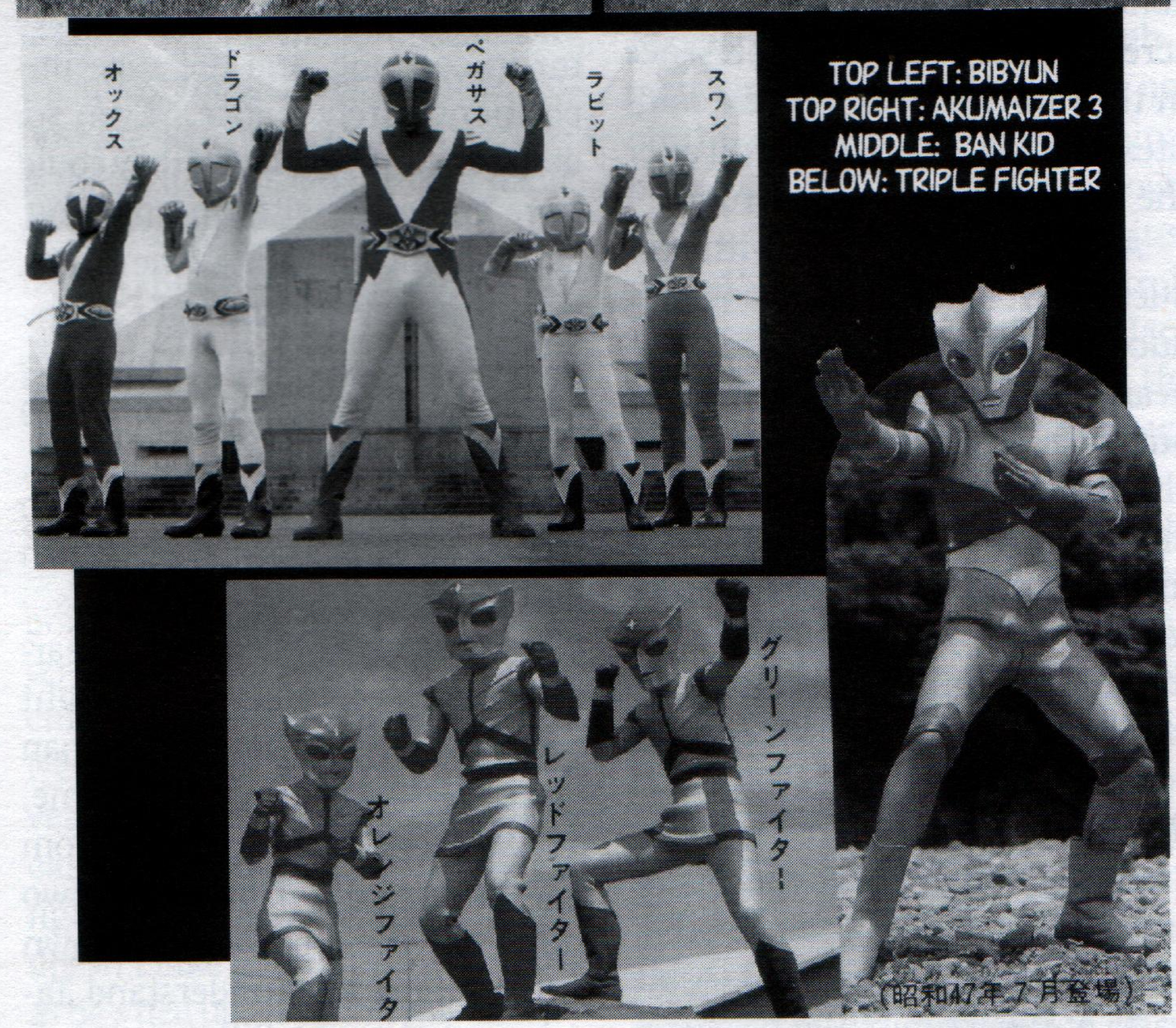
(1987), LIVEMAN (1988), TURBO RANGER (1989), FIVEMAN (1990), JETMAN (1991), ZYU RANGER (1992), DAI RANGER (1993), and KAKU RANGER (1994) are only slight. The minor changes over this decade's Sentais ar e not for the better. The first five or so of these GO RANGERS ripoffs at least offered decent battle scenes. But as with GO RANGERS's losing battle with uptight American parents in the 1970s, the 1980s Sentais (shown throughout Asia, Brazil, and parts of Europe, but never returned to America until DYNAMAN was badly dubbed into a comedy on cable TV in 1987) eventually got protests out of Japanese parents. There really wasn't a decent fight after 1985's CHANGEMAN, but the special effects continued to improve.

These 1980s Sentais developed a cult following in the U.S., thanks to the glorious VHS tape revolution. While there are numerous overpriced bootleggers (some sell tapes for as high as twenty bucks a pop!) exploiting the Sentai fans, others are content to trade tapes. U.S. Sentai fandom was a thriving underground at least ten years before the eventual, inevitable release of POWER RANGERS.

There you have it; another basic, broad overview of the Sentai genre. I never really went into specifics (i.e. actors' names, when the FX got good & fights got bad, when the giant robots first appeared, etc.), because there's too much to list in one article (and I've already done all that, over the years, in OC). But rest assured, in future editions of this publication, we'll tell you everything you never wanted to know about all these shows, as well as ripoffs like Taiwan's OUTERSP ACE SOLDIERS, Korea's HERO FLASH, and of course, BIOKIDS, from the Philippines.







TOP LEFT: BIBYUN
TOP RIGHT: AKUMAIZER 3
MIDDLE: BAN KID
BELOW: TRIPLE FIGHTER

REVIEWS

JUAN MARQUEZ SUPER NAMAN

Dir.: Mike Rela Makiling

There's bad. Ther e's worse. There's worst. Then ther e's SUPER NAMAN, which is garbage, even for the low budget Filipino fiasco that it is! It truly boggles the mind at just how bewilderingly awful a Filipino movie can get, and SUPER NAMAN gives new meaning to the phrase 'complete and utter gar - bage'. As is often the case with Filicheapies, the misleading picture on the videobox makes it seem like the colorful superheroes dominate the screen, when in fact, their presence in the film amounts to mere minutes, and even then, not until after the middle of this terrible romp!

As is so often the case with productions from Regal Films and producer Joey Marquez in particular, nearly the whole movie is padded out with endless, embarrassing, childish slapstick and fatally dull drama; all added to take up as much time as possible, to make it feature length. So if you're an idiot like me, and end up renting this piece of crap from a Filipino videostore, don't bother watching it all the way through. Don't bother scanning. Press Fast Forward until the middle of SUPER NAMAN and see what little superhero action this terrible waste of super 8mm film has to offer.

To me, the two things which really make a superhero movie are action and special effects. In the action department, the fights still tend to look too much like John Wayne-like fisticuffs. Though one villain crashes through a table (the only decent stunt), the stuntwork is unbelievably poor. The FX are only slightly better, which still gives them room to suck big time. The scene of one bird-like superhero flying is cruddy animation of the actor in costume, and the superimpositions barely suffice. Even so, despite a limited budget, they could have come up with an amusing, entertaining film if they wanted to, which they clearly did not.

Storywise, some guy who reads comic books and hangs out with little kids (kind of like Chris Elliot's character in GET A LIFE) is given strange powers. The powers (which don't happen until the film's middle) came from two boys wearing what looks like storebought Halloween accessories for a Tinman (from WIZARD OF OZ) costume, possibly constructed partially from aluminum foil. How these two runts got their powers is known only to those who understand Tagalog or whatever Filipino dialect the film's dialogue is in. Are these kids jeanies? Aliens? Leprechauns? Cyborgs? Visitors from the future? Ghosts? Wizards? I don't know (and cer - tainly don't give a damn), but their magic seems to combine our bumbling hero with his comic books! So when robbers are harassing local villagers (who pan for gold in a river), comic book heroes are conjured to life, and combine with our lame protagonist. This gives him a chance to satirize Zoro, a cowboy, Tarzan, Captain America, the Incredible Hulk, and something called "Matanguawin" (?), an eagle man I suspect to be based on old Filipino folklore, and resembling characters from old American Indian (Native American) legends. Of all these poor confrontations, the only one which is worthwhile is his brief stint as 'Capt. Pinoy', their Captain America. At least this character has a colorful costume and a motorcycle which fires cheaply superimposed laser beams.

-Damon Foster

NEUTRON THE ATOMIC SUPER-MAN VS. THE AMAZING DR. CARONTE

Dir.: Federico Curiel

As someone unfamiliar with the ancient (to me), prototypical Mexi-

can hero Neutron (I was, however, familiar with "Mr. Neutron" fr om an old sketch on MONTY PYTHON'S FL YING CIRCUS, but that's a completely dif ferent character), this primitive, B&W movie tells me Neutron just might be one of Mexico's first celluloid super heroes. Enuio Cabiate's music, the slow pace and low key production values lead me to believe NEUTRON VS. DR. CARONTE to be from the 1950s (or early 1960s, at the very latest). Having never seen Neutron before, I'm not an expert on this genre, but this little flick would appear to either be a prelude to the Mexi-wrestling movies, or only a loosely related, semi-wrestling flick. While there are no scenes taking place in a wrestling ring, there is one scene of our heroes working out in a gym. Their sparring consists mainly of wrestling moves, yet I was surprised to see a spinning back kick, since this movie seems to pre-date most western exposure to karate.

Also setting this timid drama aside from the average El Santo movie is that both masked characters (Neutron & Dr. Caronte) have their masks actually removed; their identities get revealed! This proves beyond a doubt that Neutron was not an actual wrestler outside of movies. Also so unlike the average Mexi-wrestler farce is the lack of sufficient fights. There are two or three confrontations, but they're not as exciting as they could have been, and are generally uneventful. Some confrontations are okay, while others look like they were staged by a cyclops with an eyepatch.

This slightly dull movie barely taps into the supernatural, when Dr. Caronte uses magic for what I think he called something like "Soul T ransmutation". Unfor tunately, any such fantasy element is only implied, not seen; and the only FX are the rubber masks & wigs on a few quick-buck zombies never really given much to do. These lackluster undead remind me of those in that old Ray Dennis Steckler movie THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE CREATURES THAT STOPPED LIVING AND BECAME CRAZY, MIXED UP ZOMBIES, or whatever the bloody hell it's called.

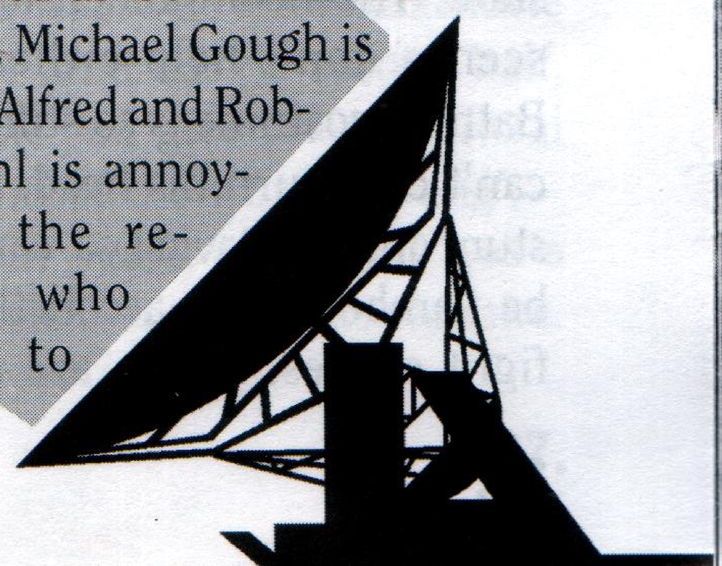
Fortunately, this talky soap opera was actually dubbed in English, making it intriguing and watchable to a Spanish-language impaired person like me. Not incredibly exciting, but it's an inter esting tale of masked mad scientist Dr. Caronte, who's got some dwar f-assistant dubbed in a funny voice and a group of witch-like zombies that we don't see much of. The course of this complex whodunit deals with the quest for a secret formula, and how masked hero Neutron see's to it that it doesn't fall into the hand of mysterious Dr. Caronte. But there's mor e to this highly formulized story than that; there are mobsters & detectives, and additional characters to add to the confusion. Villainous Dr. Caronte doesn't come off as especially evil to me as he fights gangsters at one point and has depth to his character, and is madly in love with night-club singer Nora Sanders. Anyway, Neutron gets unmasked and revealed to be a popular TV newscaster before the anticlimactic fight. Strangely, Neutron himself doesn't take part in the final fight, as he's tied up! It's some guy called Charles who does all the work! Anyway, the fight (for what it's worth) in question gives Dr. Caronte a nasty fall and he supposedly dies again.....until the next film. To be continued. ** -Damon Foster

BATMAN

1989, Dir.: Tim Burton

Six years after the hype, the huge box office grosses and obvious paid-by-the-studio critical praise ("the movie of the decade", ROLLING STONE'S Pete T ravers hilariously wrote.), we can now see this multi-million budgeted adaptation of Bob Kane's infamous comic book her o for what it really is: An unimpressive misfire.

The casting is a mixed bag. Michael Keaton's por trayal of Bruce Wayne as a nerdy schmuck is a perfect example of how not to play a heroic character. As Batman, Keaton is just too damn stoic. Check out the scene where the Joker shoots down Batman's high-tech airplane. Keaton shows not one hint of surprise that a criminal buffoon just shot his plane down with one measly bullet. He just valiantly struggles with his controls and keeps a grim expression. Jack Nicholson is too hammy as the Joker, and is given far too much screen time to chew the scenery. I thought the Joker was supposed to be a scary, psychotic and dangerous villain, not an overweight clown in his 50s. Kim Basinger is so-so as Vicki Vale, Pat Hingle is underused as Commissioner Gordon, Michael Gough is good as Alfred and Robert Wuhl is annoying as the reporter who wants to



get the scoop on Batman. Wuhl's character serves no purpose in the film other than slowing it down.

Considering the fifty years of Batman comic books at the filmmakers disposal, the story is surprisingly flat and uncompelling. Tim Burton seems so occupied with showing the Joker's descent into insanity and decay, he forgets about the story and allows the pace to drag. This hurts the fast-paced comic book feel that the movie should have. The script is full of holes and so much is set up during the first twenty minutes that half the ideas are forgotten about in the second hour (Gotham City's bankruptcy, police corruption, the Joker's desir e to have his face on the $100.00 bill, etc.). Some scenes are so poorly edited (or perhaps poorly filmed), you can't figure what is going on. And I invite any reader to write to us and explain why Batman & Vicki Vale, in the middle of the movie's big chase scene, get out of the armed (and armored) batmobile and run into a dark alley to escape the Joker's henchmen.

BATMAN also doesn't give you too much of the hero in action. Keaton is in costume for about 20 of the movie's 126 r unning time. Compare this to INFRAMAN, where the hero is in costume throughout most of the movie and his appearance is always thrilling (there is no such thing as overusing your hero in a superhero flick). No wonder everybody said the Joker stole the show. The incomprehensible action scenes don't help either . The Batman costume is so stiff, Keaton can't even turn his head, and his stunt double, David Lea, can't even be flamboyant or acrobatic in the fight scenes, which are nothing more than quick cuts of Batman kicking or punching at the camera and his opponent's r eaction.

Danny Elfman's music scor e is good, and thankfully overshadows the godawful songs of Prince. The tone of the movie is a good balance of seriousness and camp. The set design is unimpressive and looks too much like a Pinewood Studios backlot, which is what it is. For those of you who think I'm being too hard on this product (which is what it is, instead of being a film), remember: Tim Burton isn't even proud of it.

** -John Grace

WONDER GIRLFRIEND

[Hong Kong; 1993] Presented by World Video and Win's Music & Video Enterprises, Ltd., Starring Lau Wai Gun

Don't be mislead by the impressive opening kung fu kata our geeky, Anthony Wong wannabe' hero performs after the opening credits! WONDER GIRLFRIEND turns out to be a worthless, pointless exercise in futile slapstick, and is a TV movie shot on video. There are no English subtitles, possibly because they knew none of us (except fools like me) would waste an hour and a half of our lives watching this cheap, pathetic, talky, stupid waste of video.

The story would appear to be about some geeky comic book artist called Jackie who also happens to practice kung fu. Occasionally. The connection would seem to be that he lives in a fantasy world of heroes, comics and movies. So the one worthwhile scene has him in a dream sequence, riding a motorcycle and fighting ninjas on a beach. But even that brief moment of action doesn't save this lame tale of an alien visitor played by Lau Wai Gun, who was also in MRS. BUTTERFLY. She befriends Jackie and occasionally helps him using her magic powers. It is here that her naiveness in serving Jackie becomes little more than an imitation of I DREAM OF JEANIE, but with occasional cheap computer FX. She needs to drink lots of water to stay alive. Don't be fooled by the video box which shows a picture of Saturn; this is no sci-fi film, it's just a poor, low key, low budget, low-to-no entertainment value, unwatchable comedy.

-DF

THE EVIL BRAIN FROM OUTERSPACE

Directors: Teruo Jshii, Akira Mitsuwa & Koreyoshi Akasaka
Music: Chumei Watanabe

Shintoho's pr ototypical Japanese superhero movie from 1957! Forget the old comments we used to hear from idiotic non-Starman (aka "Super Giant", though he's nor mal size) fans who called these B&W epics 'cheap', 'cheesy', or 'campy'. I have a different set of descriptive words for it: Masterpiece and Classic! Despite its limited budget, THE EVIL BRAIN FROM OUTERSPACE, like Starman's other thr ee excellent movies, is action packed, wellmade and fun, fun, fun! Unlike his American role model Superman, Starman never let the bad guys get scared and run into each other & walls, he just clobbered them! Starman is capable of fighting! And fighting! And fighting! Actor Ken Utsui packs in plenty of karate chops, boxing punches that miss by a mile, and judo tosses! Naturally, some-

thing this old, primitive & crude lacks a lot of kicking (though a mutant monster at least attempts a couple spinning-back-kicks, way ahead of their times), but there are acrobatic flips a plenty.

Granted, the obligatory kiddies are quirky & kinda' dumb, and early 'destruction' scenes are mere stock footage and substandard miniatures. Another minor problem is the choppy pacing; actually independent episodes having little to do with each other, despite frequent voice-over narratives which try to link it all together, and sounding bloody obvious as a result. You see, the Starman flicks are edited from a series of theatrical serials, known in Japan as SUPER GIANT #1 (1956), SUPER GIANT #2 (1956), KOTETSU NO KIOJIN--KAISEIJI NO MAJYO (1957), KOTETSU NO KYOJIN- CHIKYU METSUBO SUNZEN (1957), JINKO EISEI NO GEKITOTSU (1958), and others; I believe there were originally nine different serials in all! In this case, link ups & cover ups include two independent villains (never seen together) who are dubbed as being brothers!

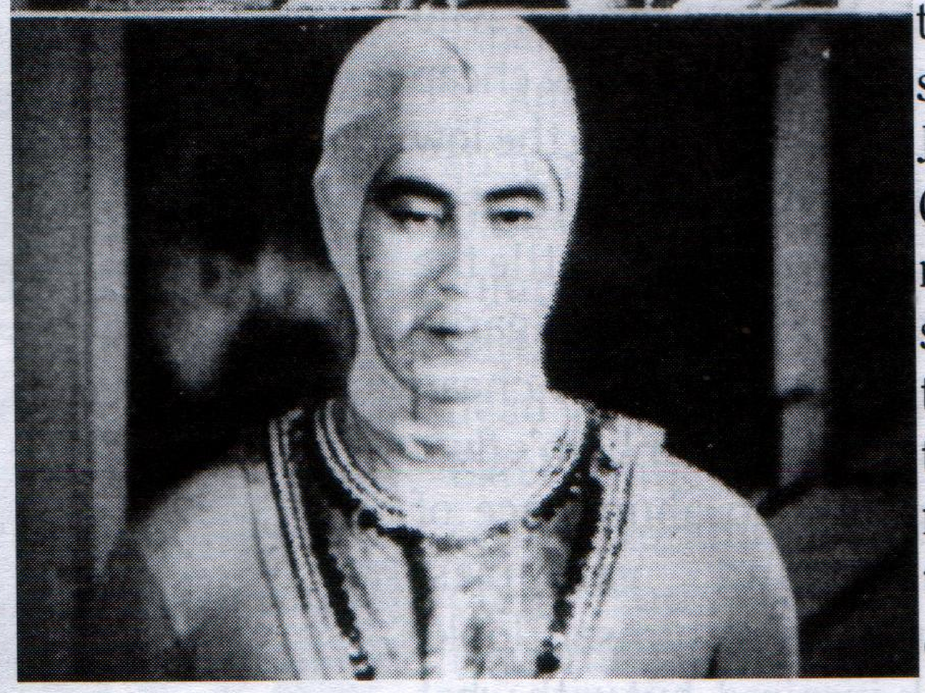
Jack Grimes and other people with the coolest voices ever (no "but still"s here!) dubbed this episodic groundbreaker about the brain of Balazar, sort of an Adolph Hitler from outerspace! The living brain is on Earth where mad scientists (their labs in cool underground arsenals, hidden by revolving, camouflaged doors, etc.) help it to create mutants and Zimarian henchmen who wear Batman-like leotards and do nazi salutes! The villains' bases are nice sets, perfect for fights and reverse jumps (playing the film backwards). So naturally, Starman (Ken Utsui), who happens to enjoy fighting & reverse jumps, has left his robotic companions (versed in simple sign language and basic gestures despite their highly advanced technology) at the Emerald Planet to protect Japan from Planet Zimar's Balazar brain and its followers. With help from Detective Okamoto, a couple silly tots, squads of cops in riot gear, and Dr. Sakurai, Starman destroys the henchmen, fanged mutants (over-the-top and creepy!), and even some weird witch lady, and it's Dr . Sakurai's new for mula which makes Balazar, well- braindead.

***** -DF

EVIL BRAIN FROM OUTERSPACE







KUMANDER BAWANG KALABAN NG MGA ASWANG

[Viva Films; 1988] Dir.: Ramje, Prod.: Ramon Salvador

KUMANDER BAWANG confirms that the Filipinos are fiercely proud of making the world's worst movies, and they continually set new [low] standards, and always manage to top themselves- that is, I mean, they manage to bottom themselves! Jesus Christ, I must have scanned through the entire first half of this typically cheap, darkly lit, fiercely dull (and proud of it!) waste of film! Yet again, it's another exercise in Filipino deceit, in that the videobox highlights the more exciting elements, yet those don't happen until after the middle of the movie!

But damn it, I gotta' be honest that this otherwise worthless movie did have an amusing second half, and it helped give me an official definition of the word 'aswang', which for years, I thought was a specific species of Filipino vampire.

Now I know it's simply the Filipino word for vampire, as KUMANDER BAWANG has vampires of all shapes and sizes: Sexy female vampires, midget vampires in diapers, a gay vampire, Dracula clones, breakdancing mummies, disco dancing vampires, and of course, the obligatory Mananangal (the type which split in the middle so their upper halves can fly around like a bat). All are apparently considered aswangs, aka vampires.

Herbert Bautista is some dorky teenager who bores us with poor comedy & poor drama before the army of Aswangs finally starts attacking the villagers (bloodlessly; it's a kiddie film all the way , despite a homosexual vampire who works in a salon of course) near the middle of the film. So some wizard, who lives in a cave with a gorilla & cheap monster turns Herbert into the low key superhero Kumander (that's their spelling) Bawang, to battle the vampires using the power of garlic and a magic pendant. The cheap FX are amusing, like our hero's flying scenes, and an abundance of cool, exploding vampires. Kumander Bawang himself looks comic book-inspired, but with what looks like a T-shirt wrapped around his head and eye holes cut out. Eventually, the villagers gather up torches to raid the vampire mansion, and Kumander Bawang singles out the few remaining aswangs. It's kinda' neat when their coffins fly and fire beams, but I was thoroughly disgusted by a scene of an aswang who turns himself into a guinea pig who gets his head caught in a mousetrap. Cruelty to animals is terrible, especially in a stupid movie like this. 1/2

THE THREE SUPER GUYS STRIKE BACK

("NUEVO GOLPE DE LOS TRES MAGNIFICOS")
Distributed by Flash Video (Venezuela), Presented by Zeljko Kunkera, Screenplay: John Fergusen, Music: Stelvio Cipriani, Costumes: Claudia, Sets: Tom Cartney, Makeup: Carlo Renzini, Dir. of Phot.: Jan Nura, Cast: Robert Widmark, George Arkin, Jim Gordon, Harry Goldman, Helen Christie, Art Bindi, Reviewed by DF

First of all, I'll state it right out front: This is <u>not</u> a superhero movie! Theoretically, this 'adult comedy' doesn't really belong in this magazine. But because it's probably Italian (though obviously European) and uses "3" and "Super" in its title, a great many of us hoped it would be another THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN-type masterpiece, which it's <u>not!</u> The three 'Super Guys' don't wear superhero attire, nor is there the slightest hint of sci-fi or fantasy in this typical Euro-heist yarn. So I'm including it in HOF#2 to get the word out and set the record straight; to warn superhero fans to steer clear of it this misleading film series. As yet, I've not seen the other movies: THE THREE SUPER GUYS, and THE THREE SUPER GUYS IN THE SNOW.

But hell, as long as I'm here, and have just watched this 1970s caper, I might as well complete this review! Though it's no super hero fantasy, is an action comedy, and bears some resemblance to the THREE SUPERMEN films in that aspect. It's fast paced, and full of chases- or rather, the whole movie is one long chase. It's cer tainly not boring. It's two or thr ee fist fights are pretty long, and offer an interesting combination: Barroom brawling/boxing and acrobatics! Somehow, I've always consider ed mid-air somersaults an Asian thing, I thought acrobatics could only mix with karate and kung fu! Yet very little of the skirmishes in this romp involve martial arts, but so long as the tumbling mix well with the otherwise John Wayne-inspired fistplay! One fight in a gym (they utilize apparatus in the fight) obviously inspired the American GYMKATA flick. The actors (especially the blond guy) are energetic, limber and do some cool stunts.

However, most of the humor in this slapstick comedy is neither funny nor stupid, and just sort of sits there pointlessly. Either the jokes just aren't funny when dubbed in English, or the comedy writers got their gags from Jerry Lewis's wastepaper basket.

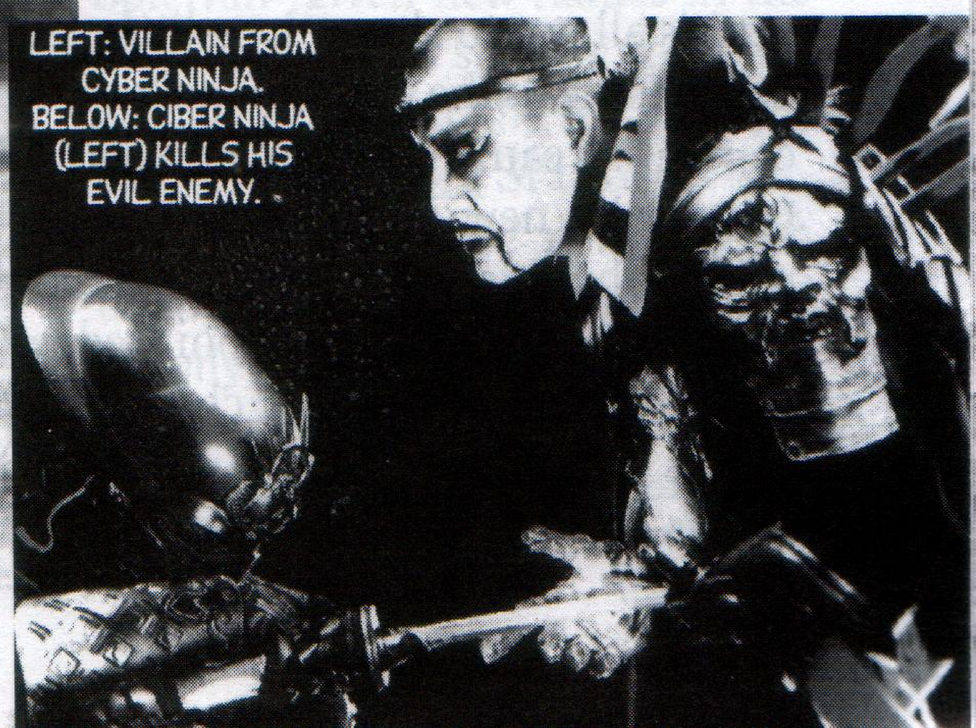
The three 'Super Guys' are thieves called Hercules, Casanova and the 3rd is dubbed 'Foxy Loxy' (?), yet the Spanish subtitles call him 'Zorro' (?)! Go figure. Anyway, they've stolen a lot of money from some mafia and are fighting among themselves (every guy for himself) to see who gets to keep it. Throw in naked ladies, endless chases, and generally unsuccessful comedy, and that pretty much sums up this wacky, tacky, silly, goofy, sometimes dumb, but never dull movie. After plenty of semi-amusing situations, the mobsters get arrested and the cops confiscate the much sought after cash. This movie may be worth checking out . . . . once. ** -DF

CYBER NINJA

Dir.: Keita Amemiya; 1988

Musket-style gatling guns? Holographic scrolls? Robot ninjas that can shoot shurikens from their wrists? No you're not watching the politically correct POWER RANGERS (if I see one more article in the local paper on that stupid show, I swear I'll scream!). This is the world of Producer Keiji Takagi's MIRAI NINJA ("Future Ninja")! This film (starring Hanbei Kawai and Hiroki Ida of ZERAM) is a classic example of modern Japanese sci-fi at its finest. The unique blending of futuristic technology with the Bushido is what sets this movie apart from a lot of the new stuff coming from Japan. Giant mechanical moving fortresses blast each other away on the battlefield while the weapon of choice for the samurai is still the sword (albeit an energy charged one). Cyberninja himself looked like a cross between a ninja and a character out of the STAR WARS universe. Even the dubbing in this movie is tolerable. Streamline Pictures has to be given credit for using voice actors that don't sound as if they're reading from a script (which is a main turn-off of English dubbed films). The action, stunning visuals and awesome soundtrack add up to one of the most unique & entertaining sci-fi adventures to come out of Japan to date.

After the Suwabeh Clan's ar my suffers a devastating defeat by the Dark Overlord's mechaninjas, an injured Jiromaru wakes up on the battlefield to find his comrades dead and his brother missing. Later in the forest Akagi, a mercenary working for the Suwabeh clan runs into Shiranui (Cyberninja), who's just destr oyed a group of mechaninja. Shiranui retreats to the treetops just as Jiromaru shows up. It turns out that Shiranui is actually Jiromaru's br other Hiyukaku who was turned into a cyborg by the



LEFT: VILLAIN FROM CYBER NINJA.
BELOW: CIBER NINJA (LEFT) KILLS HIS EVIL ENEMY.

Raimei, the Dark Bishop, the head good of the Dark Overlord. Shiranui escaped after having memories of his past life. To make matters worse, Princess Saki, the Suwabeh clans's leader is kidnapped just as her army was preparing to destroy Raimei's castle with a new canon. She is to be used as a sacrifice for the coming of the Dark Overlord. Akagi volunteers to rescue the princess and takes Jiromaru and four other samurai with him. Shiranui joins them during their first battle with the mechaninja who make short work of them leaving Akagi, Jiromaru and Shiranui the only ones standing. They steal a flying sled and crash their way into the Raimei's castle. They take on yet more mechninja as well as super-baddie Shogi. Jiromaru is attacked from behind by Raimei. Before he dies, he realized that Shiranui is his brother. Shiranui kills Raimei, Akagi releases the princess and they escape from the castle just before it's blown up by the super canon. ***1/2 -Patricia Gonzales

THE MASK

1994, Starring Jim Carrey

It's pr etty pathetic when a movie can feature a talented, frequently hilarious comedian, outstanding computer FX and Virtual Reality, and cleavage & babes galore, and yet it's all put to shame by a little dog who steals the film. I'm no fan of mainstream American movies (especially new ones), which explains why this sappy, predictable, cliche-ridden farce disappointed me. The humor is lame & childish in this typically stupid kiddie film. James Carrey was hilarious as a stand-up comedian, and quite funny in the first two seasons of IN LIVING COLOR (before Keenan Ivory Wayans told Fox or whoever to go screw themselves), and was somewhat amusing in ACE VENTURA: PET DETECTIVE. As Carrey's fame & wealth incr eases, his humor becomes more timid and mainstream.

This isn't to say I absolutely despised THE MASK, I mean, in its own naive way, it's lively , flashy & colorful. It's only tr uly boring scenes are in its romantic subplots, of which I've seen in countless American movies before. It's amazing they couldn't come up with something vaguely original. Oops, I forgot! This was meant to be my 'positive' paragraph! Okay , so the movie offered a couple chuckles, and again, the computerized morphing effects are incredible.

This naive salute to the cartoons & movies of the 1940s has James Carrey as a downtrodden banker who finds some ancient mask which gives him as assortment of wacky, magical powers which he uses to 'fight' (or rather , dance with) crime. As this green faced superhero (who looks & acts more like a super villain; the Joker comes to mind), he has difficulty in controlling his actions, as he also robs a bank at one point. But the real villains are mobsters running some overpriced, overhyped, glitzy, geeky, so-called 'high society' night club (screw that! Give me a dingy club with a mosh-pit and a punk band jamming some serious anarchy!), though the shapely singer in the club falls for our hero, of course. It ends after our hero, The Mask, gets help from his little dog to aid police in arresting the villainous gangsters. * -DF



THE MASK

LUCHA A MUERTE

Directors: Luis Garcia and J. Fernando

As is all too often the case with Mexican wrestling romps, 1993's LUCHA A MUERTE ("Fight T o Die") is nothing but a feature length excuse to make use of pre-filmed bouts in the ring. Granted, the matches of Octagon and Mascara Sagrada are well choreographed and feature painfully looking bodyslams, drop kicks and uniquely Mexican acrobatics.

These hombres definitely put on an exhilarating performance! Sadly, the movie's only two str eet fights are short, spread way too far apart, lack proper sound FX and are further ruined by terrible photography & lame choreography. It's as though they only know how to do good fights when in the ring- there must be some magic in the ropes.

In fact, 75% of the movie is dull & stupid, I doubt I'd have loved it even with translation! Its production values are okay (or even good, by cheap Mexican standards) I suppose, though I've only seen a few Mexican wrestling flicks. It's a far cr y from the old days of SANTO VS. THE VAMPIRE WOMEN! If all current Mexi-wrestling movies are as pointless, slow paced & talky as this, I can see why such movies aren't as popular as before! What the hell happened? They decide to eliminate all production values and most entertainment value?

Despite its low key, lackluster approach, I can still vaguely recommend it for three reasons: 1. The wrestling bouts are impressive; even to me, somebody who normally dislikes wrestling. 2. Mascara Sagrada has a cool costume, the mask was obviously inspired by infinitely superior Japanese superheroes! 3. There are three stunningly sexy actresses (i.e. gorgeous Lina Santos!) in it; though almost any gal looks good in a form fitting skirt, push-up bra, bathing suits and bewilderingly skin-tight spandex bodysuits. So for one reason or another, this movie has its moments, and the two main wrestlers make a good duo. Octagon's attire, including headband & sash, is somewhat Far East inspired, so during the film, he does a Bruce Lee-like hop (sparring and prancing up & down), and even a couple decent karate kicks. But whenever a wrestler attempts a flying kick (infrequent), he falls flat on his face! Judo tosses are performed exceptionally.

In between bouts with assorted villainous wrestlers like the Blue Panther, our motorcycling duo is battling crime on the streets, beaches and fields of Mexico. Octagon and Mascara Sagrada have singled out one particular group of wealthy, high class criminals who own yachts and a home by some lake. As the script roles along like a retarded snail, we abruptly cut to more matches in the ring, having nothing to do with the story! Getting back on track, Octagon & friend ride mini-electric gliders ("Ultra-Light"s, I believe they were once called) to get a bird's eye view of the villains who steal & smuggle jewelry. The eventual confrontation between the not very-dynamic duo and the three ninja-like spandex babes had such potential! They somehow managed to take a promising fight and ruin it! It could have so easily been choreographed, photographed & edited into an awesome spectacle, but they spent extra time to make sure it was as lame as possible! It lasts mere seconds, and there are obviously men as stunt doubles for the blatantly curvaceous ladies! Our two heroes quickly dispatch these villains, and then of course comes another victory, though a long one; in the ring. ** -DF

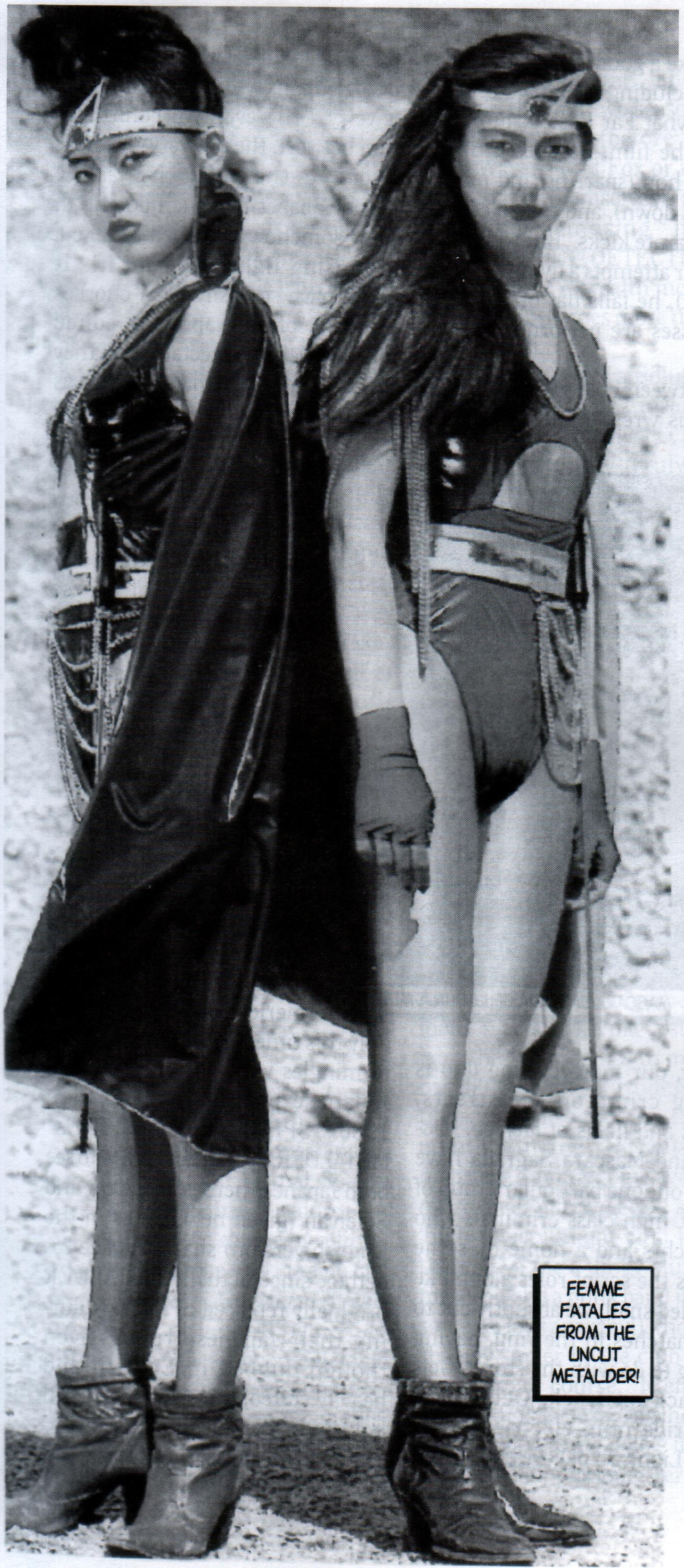


MASCARA SAGRADA OF LUCHA A MUERTE

V.R. TROOPERS

Producer: Robert Hughes

Here we go with another superhero TV series. Saban Entertainment, them champs of superhero superseding, give us their second American/Japanese hybrid, only this time, U.S. shot footage intermingles with not one, but two Japanese programs from Toei: 1986's SPIEL VAN, and 1987's METALDER. It's kinda' weir d to see both Japanese heroes, Metalder and Spielvan (given new names in the English version) sharing space together, since actually METALDER originally replaced SPIELVAN during their Japanese runs! Even though dubbed in English and heavily edited, the excitement still holds up, regardless of these programs being nearly ten years old!



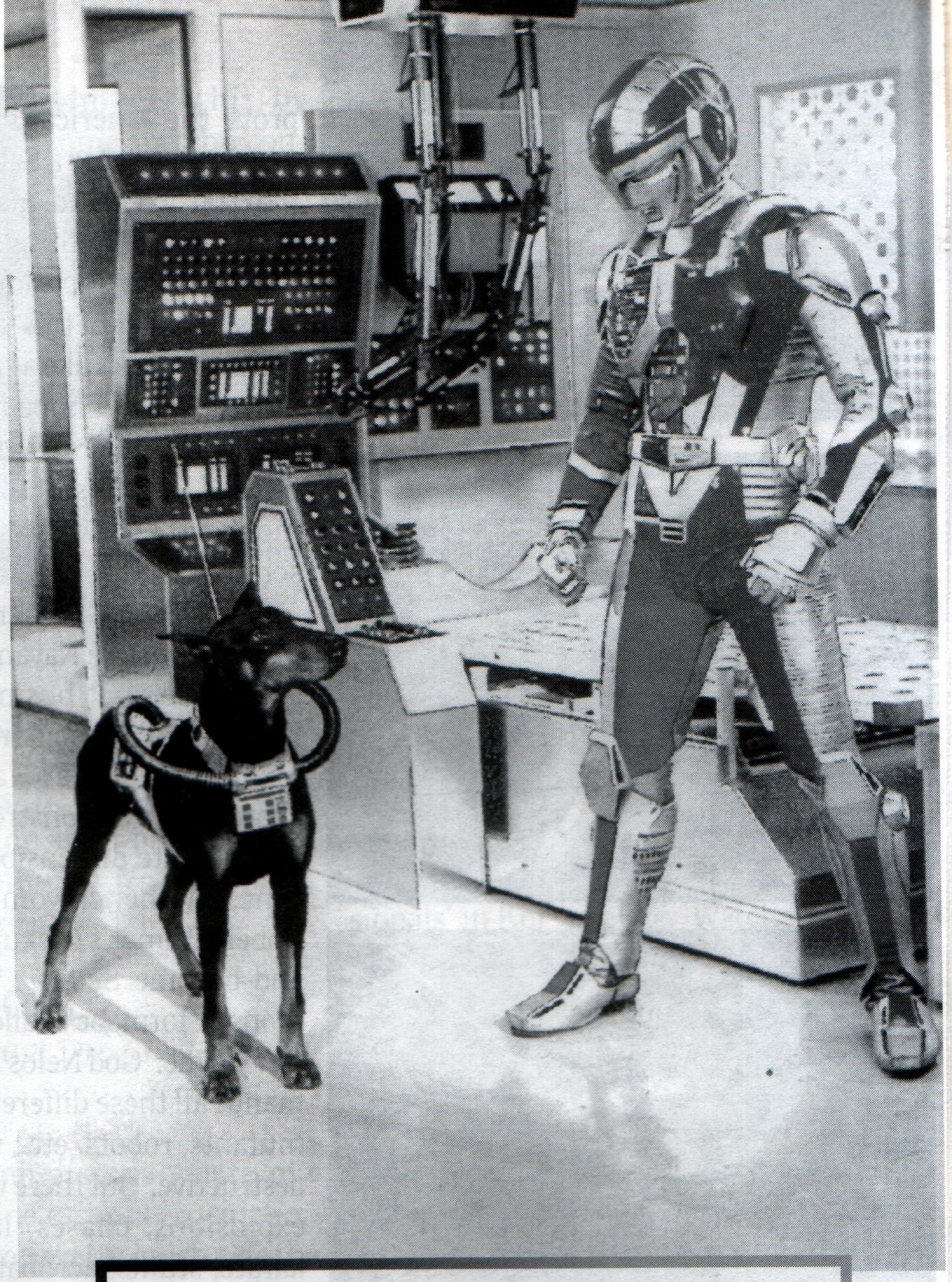
While METALDER was decent, I was never really impressed by SPIELVAN (or any other post-1983 programs from Japan), so I no longer care what the American releasers do to them. How many of you kids watching this show have actually noticed you never really see all three heroes fighting in the exact same shot? It should be obvious that they were never meant to be fighting the same villains, and the poorly constructed American replacement costumes do little to add continuity or patch up the rough edges. While the American-made Metaldar mask is passable (though a little smaller and less shiny), the new Spielvan helmet is pathetic compared to its glossy, Japanese counterpart! Who do they think they'r e fooling? There's no way even the greatest stuntman could fight in this bulky thing! If anything, they'll confuse some people, wondering if there are three heroes or six!

But despite VR TROOPERS's flaws, I consider it the successor to SPIELVAN, and as good as METALDER. In the mid-1980s, censorship in Japan put a limit on how much fighting could appear on Japanese TV, where as American kiddie TV was dull for way too long; so our twerps are ready for kicks and flips, the likes of which Japan's brats haven't seen since 1982! The henchmen androids from SPIELVAN were originally such whimps, they were weak and sounded like a cross between Woody Woodpecker and Alvin the Chipmonk. Now these same android pilots have been reincarnated as 'Scugs', and are able to do superb martial arts and stuntwork! Hard to believe that characters originally played by J.A.C. ("Japan Action Club") members look so much str onger, limber & energetic when played by Hollywood stuntmen! Hell, even their costumes are completely identical to those in the Japanese original.

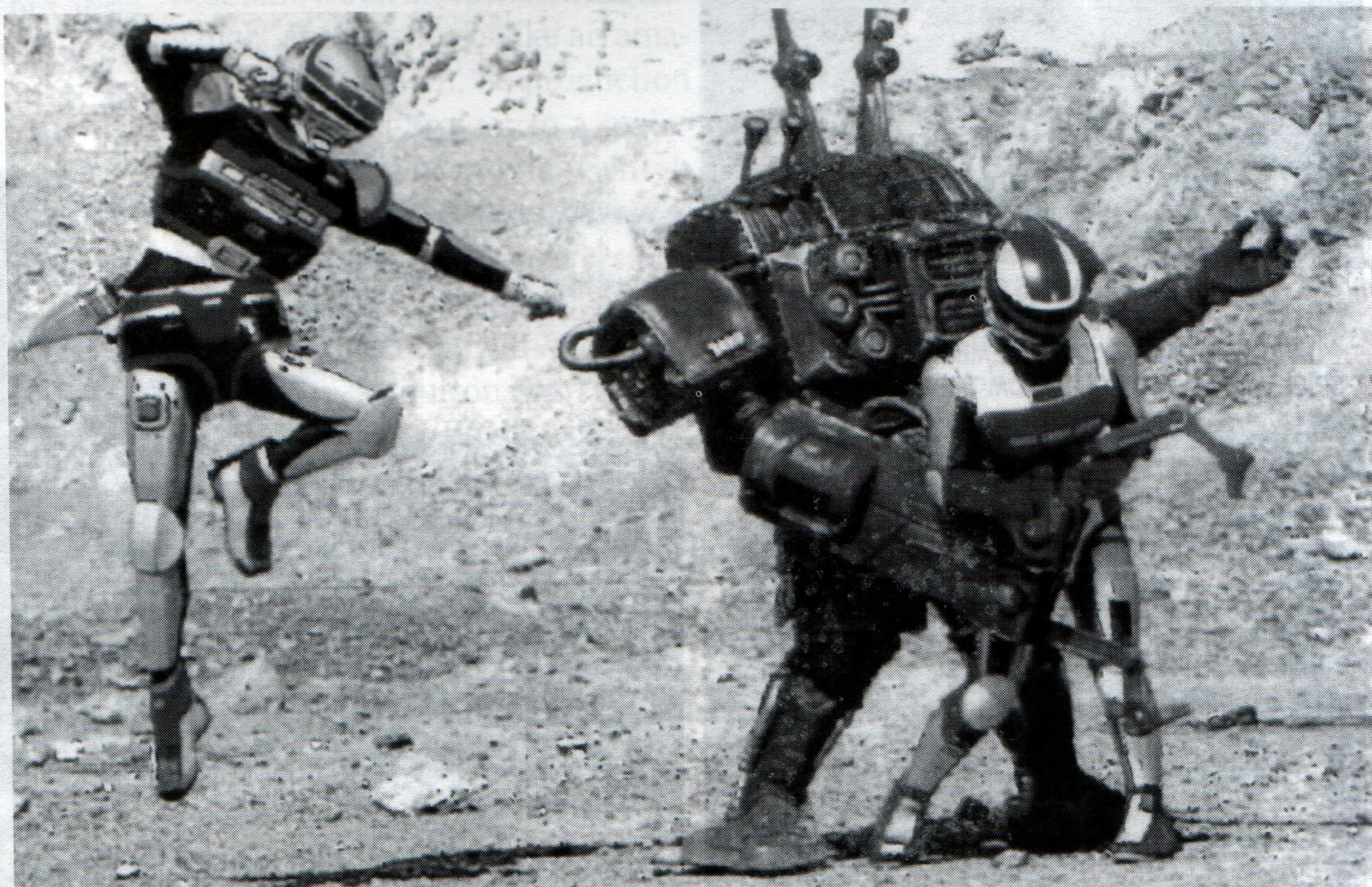
Of the three bastardized (POWER RANGERS, SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD and this one) programs, VR TROOPERS is the most intelligent & seriously written. At least in my area, it was considered

good enough to air at 5 P.M. for a few months, a timeslot previously had by STAR TREK! So at times, it comes off as serious science fiction and adventure. I hear that kiddies are dismissing V.R. TROOPERS as "just okay", and that more grown-ups are getting into it! There's far less cor ny humor than the other two, and it's nowher e near as embarrassing. Ryan (Brad Hawkins), who becomes what the Japanese called Metalder, is a cool character who wears a leather jacket and rides a motorcycle. He's still a little too goody-two-shoes, but a lot cooler than the geeks of POWER RANGERS. Even VR TROOPERS's token black, J.B. (Michael Bacon), aka SPIELVAN, is a serious, no-nonsense character who'd never make an idiot of himself doing typically stupid "Black Ranger" stuff like breakdancing in the middle of a fight! The obligatory sexy female is a photographer/reporter called Kaitlin (Sarah Brown), she's quite a looker , and without the airheaded valleygirl personality Amy Jo Johnson got stuck playing in POWER RANGERS. All three actors in VR TROOPERS are great martial artists, I think it makes these the best fights in an American series since THE GREEN HORNET! VR TROOPERS's fights ar e certainly more fun than any I've seen in a Claude V an Damne flick.

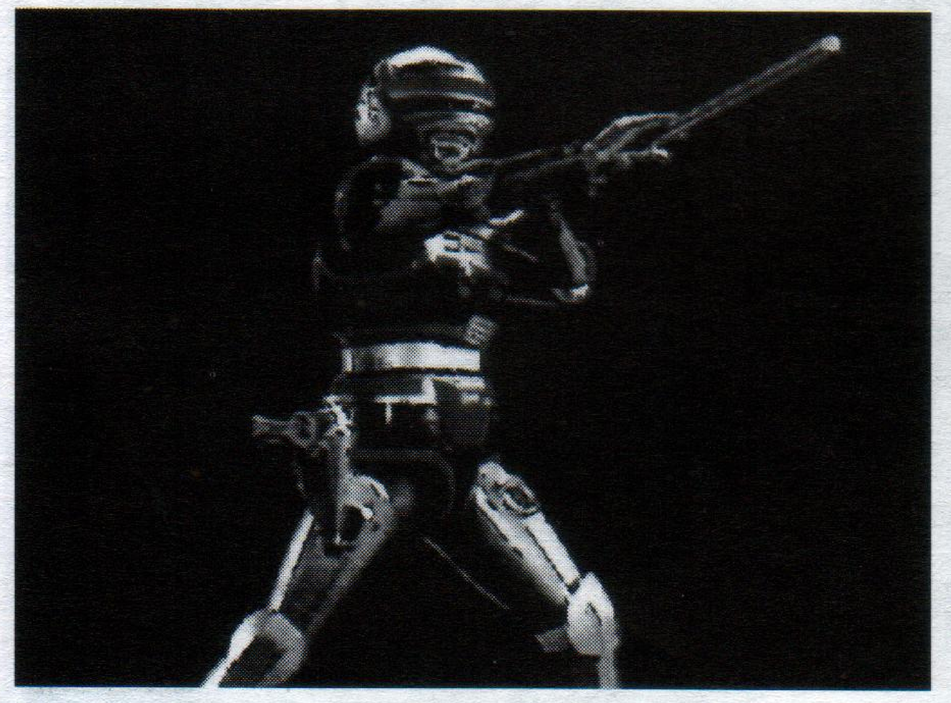
Interesting to note that our three heroes have an alternate costumed/hero form, for when they go into "Battle Grid Mode"! Though these scenes don't happen in every episode, they're my favorite scenes in the show! Not only are there costumed heroes fighting henchmen Scugs, but entirely new, all-American costumes and footage! These three new designs were never in any Japanese series, they're domestic products made for the show! While the costumes themselves aren't as cool as the Japanese ones, and tend to look like cheaper Power Rangers, these scenes

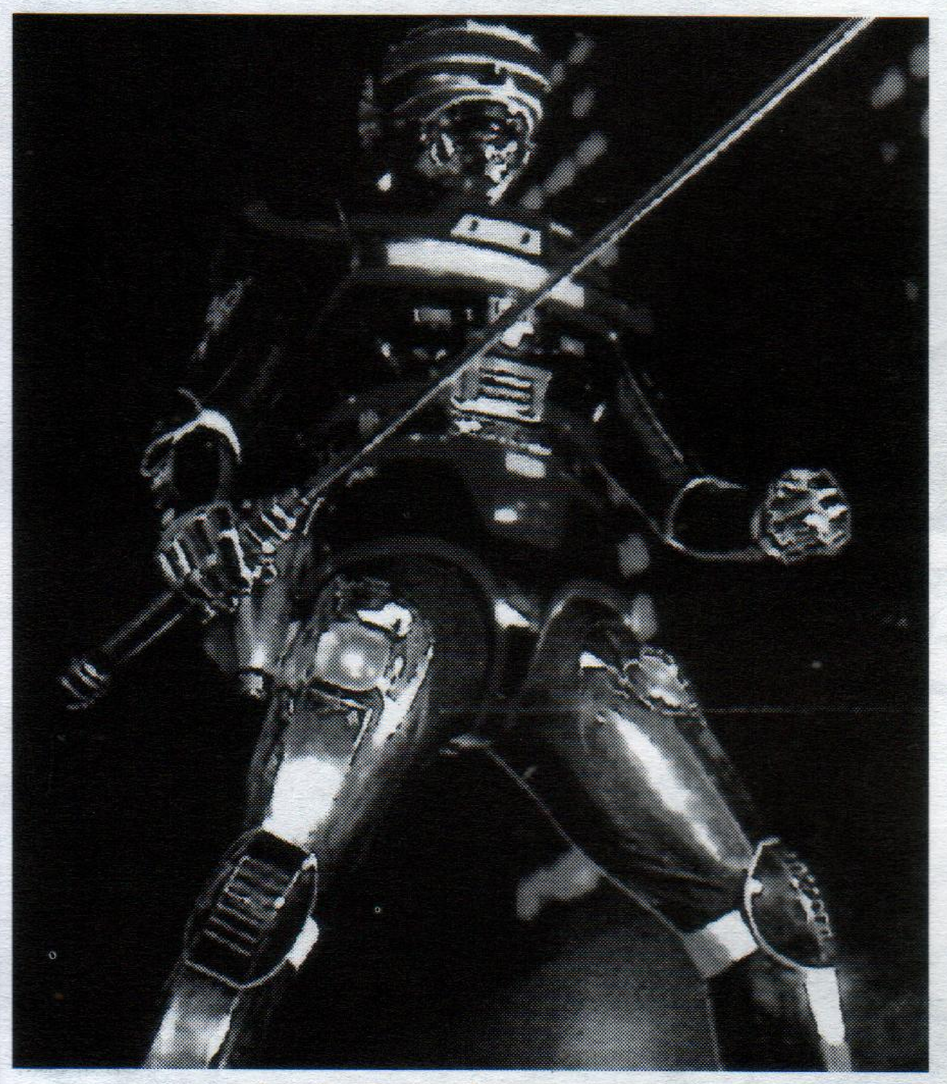


ABOVE: METALDER WITH SPRINGER, WHO GOT REPLACED BY ZEB.
BELOW: SPIELVAN AND DIANA BATTLE AN EVIL MONSTER.

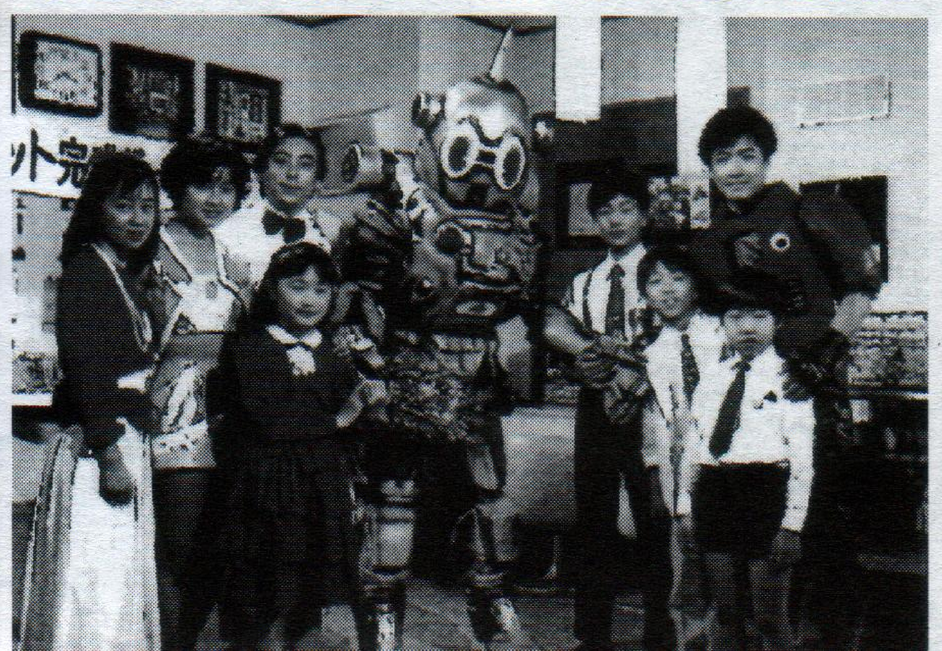








TOP: SPIELVAN'S DEATH BLOW
MIDDLE: SPIELVAN
BELOW: ORIGINAL CAST MEMBERS FOR JAPAN'S SPIELVAN WHO GOT CUT FROM THE ENGLISH VERSION.



prove the Americans are catching on! As always for a Saban show, the martial arts and acrobatics are great, the only things lacking are the obviously superior Japanese effects. The set of this 'alternate dimension' looks like a set, like a disguised stage. I hope in the future, Saban can liberate itself from rehashed Japanese footage and do more of their own stuff like this, by scratch!

Storywise, Gardner Baldwin replaces Hirosuke Kayama as the new greedy, corrupt businessman (Mr. Ziktor) who's also sur rounded by beautiful women, and he can change into a monstrous leader in an alternate dimension. Only this time, the henchwomen look like Robert Palmer's backup musicians and become Scugs. When in his monster form, he's called Grimlor d (real name: 'God Nelos'). He commands all these different monsters, mutants, robots, etc., who are very destructive. But there won't be any explosions, chases, laser beams, karate, stunts, acrobatics, gunplay or missiles unless we have a team of semi-Japanese heroes to fight them, right?! So young adults Ryan, J.B., and Kaitlin do just that, become Japanese-ish superheroes! After all, JB knows all about high-tech things like computers, and all three have black belts in karate, thanks to disciplining at Tao's (Richard Rabago) Dojo! Another supporting good guy is Professor Hart (Julian Combs), who's par t of a computer dimension (we see him on TV screens only), like Max Headroom or Patrick Macnee's character in SUPER FORCE. Hart advises our heroes on their adventures fighting the bad guys. Also on hand is Jeb (aka Zeb) a talking dog replacing Springer, a doberman pincher who spoke Japanese in the original Japanese version (METALDER). Despite this large supporting cast, there's still enough room for tons of action and magnificent special effects, not to mention an effective subplot about Ryan's long lost father , who taught him so much (most episodes start with a flashback to Ryan's childhood). **1/2 -DF

HELVINA VS. SPIELVAN





SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD

METEORMAN

Dir.: Robert Townsend

Dismal, American-made trash from 1993. Comedian Robert Townsend (who, in other films like HOLLYWOOD SHUFFLE was actually kinda' funny) stars and directed this predictable, wussy flick about a superhero dealing with gangs in some black ghetto in Washington D.C. As a comedy, there are a couple chuckles, but as a superhero adventure, it's lackluster and whimpy. Oldtimers like Bill Cosby & Frank Gorshin appear, but it's James Earl Jones who steals the movie (for what it's wor th) as an aging man trying to be hip- or rather, how do I put it? I know, he's trying to 'chill in 'da hood with 'da home boys, know wha'm sayin'? Regardless, this is only recommendable to fans of Townsend's comedy, and not to superhero fans; it never quite reaches that level of excitement.

Let's get this over with. A couple decent FX don't save this talky , cliche-ridden story of a cowardly school teacher (Robert Townsend) who gets hit by some meteor containing an alien substance which turns him into superhero Meteorman. What follows are a series of morality-stuffed misadventures with plenty of positive messages, but no positive entertainment. When he finally fights the ridiculous gang members at the end, he does the very worst Bruce Lee imitation ever put on film. Rating: Nothing! No star! This movie is garbage! -DF

STAR VIRGIN

[Japan; 1989] Dir.: Ichiro Ohmomo

The opening scene where our lovely heroine escapes crucifiction by a giant frog pretty much sets the pace for this quirky comedy. STAR VIRGIN is low budget for a Japanese film, it's an independent movie which, at times looks like an amateur film. As such, its production values look equivalent to a mainstream Korean movie (which should give you some idea just how bad off Korean movie makers are, compared to the Japanese!), but far more entertaining, with a quicker pace. The scan button wasn't necessary. So STAR VIRGIN won't get confused with the work of Toho or Toei, but despite the limited bucks, Ichiro Ohmomo & Hajime Tabi managed to come up with an amusing, watchable little film. Just don't expect another KAMEN RIDER or ULTRAMAN. It's not that epic, and there's no fighting to speak of. Also, don't be fooled by the shots of our wisecracking heroine holding a sword; if there's any major swor d-play in this movie, I missed it when I blinked. To be fair, actress Eiko Kuroki doesn't really look built for athletic stuff, as it might give her back problems later on.

The special effects range from great, to good, to okay, to enjoyably bad; though as a comedy, it's few poor FX add to the fun. There are cheap, unrealistic props and monster costumes, but plenty of good ones too, to make up for it. If anything, this Japanese, independent epic should prove inspirational to amateur film makers and 'professionals' in Kor ea alike. Watch for resourceful use of force perspective shots and quick inserts which give this under budgeted, over ambitious movie credibility.

As a movie itself, I'll give it three whole stars. One star for its abundant monsters, another for its fairly quick pace, and another for beautiful Eiko Kuroki, who plays the title heroine. So on the whole, it's an above average movie. Its only boring scene is a pointless time-filler in a dentist's of fice (a pathetic attempt at comedy, I suppose), though it's being all in Japanese (except for the opening credits, strangely) is a minor obstacle. I enjoyed STAR VIRGIN not only for voluptuous Eiko Kuroki, but for its monsters and robots. One robot, who chases our gorgeous heroine throughout the film, later becomes a good guy when little kids surround him, mistaking him for one of the many Transformer-type heroes so common on Japanese TV. There's also a brief shot involving a

giant dungbeetle, which is pretty funny.

I should point out that, despite the title and the scene with a huge frog (the only sexually suggestive sequence), this is not an adult film. Though Star Virgin's outfit is skimpy (a space-age bikini, basically), there's no nudity or matur e subject matter (unless the Japanese dialogue uses 'bad words' in their language). However, it's not nearly as childish as so many Japanese TV shows, which at times, it appears to be spoofing.

Star Virgin, who flies around in a spaceship and a scooter (it too flies) got her powers from her father, who it seems couldn't afford a chastity belt for her, so he apparently invented some super-electronic armband for her to wear. Now every time she gets too close to a man or it seems her virginity might be threatened, this magic arm-ornament (on her left arm) turns her into a superhero! That's why a monstr ous frog's huge tongue failed to rape her at the beginning. It seems the frog, as well as armored tanks, robots, giant spiders & beetles were created by some evil, strange scientist played by singer Isao Sasaki (who's voice is heard in theme songs for SPACE CRUISER YAMAT0, METALDER, CAPTAIN HARLOCK, DANGUARD ACE, and countless other Japanese programs). Sasaki also seems to have kidnapped some annoyingly geeky butterfly catcher called Gou, for whatever reason. So Star Virgin, when not being chased through jungles & forests by one of Sasaki's r obots or monsters, keeps rescuing him. Eventually, our mighty heroine defeats most of these creatures (others are only seen once or twice then disappear, leaving it open for a possible sequel) using ridiculous methods; including the old 'slip on a banana peal' gag. But Sasaki and his henchmen all survive, as does one of his main robots, though as mentioned before, the robot has a change of heart and starts dancing with kiddies. The story ends with Star Virgin and the geek frolicking on the beach.



*** -DF

TATTOOED TEENAGE ALIEN FIGHTERS FROM BEVERLYHILLS

Dir.: Brad Kreisberg

Decent American-made inserts for POWER RANGERS and V.R. TROOPERS had me convinced Americans could come up with <u>their own</u> worthwhile programs (completely independent from Japanese stock footage), filmed by scratch! Who needs FX bought from old Japanese superhero programs? Well, TATTOOED TEENAGE ALIEN FIGHTERS FROM BEVERLYHILLS (created & written by the Jims Fisher & Staahl) proves I spoke to soon! This show is the first post-POWER RANGERS series in the U.S. to concentrate exclusively on domestically shot footage, and as such, falls flat and bombs miserably! This complete loser of a series makes me actually respect the similarly inept SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD. I don't car e that TATTOOED TEENAGE etc. is shot on video (so is SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD, only it has "Filmlook" to deceive us), but with the money they saved, you'd think they could put that to good use. They did not. This show is stupid, cheap, lame, boring, and like the aborted, illfated ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO, proves Americans just don't understand how to make exciting superheroes! The only saving grace is that this shot-on-video series is better than similar shows I saw as a kid in the 1970s, like ELECTRA WOMAN AND DYNAGIRL. But then, so was PHOTON. Hell, even the title "T attooed Teenage Alien Fighters from Beverlyhills" rips off anything and everything.

I would only watch TEENAGE etc. to stare at sexy Leslie Danon, who plays one of the four heroes, Scorpio. Otherwise, it's a dull, lackluster series about an alien brain called Nimbar, the only brain associated with this show. This benevolent alien is always combating the atrocities of a Darth Vader-clone called Emperor Gorganis, who, along with his wise-cracking bird/puppet, is a hankerin' for control of a series of Power Portals, which includes the Earth. So that slimy brain-thing turns these four idiots into 'Galactic Sentinels', cheap looking superheroes who look like a cross between The Fantastic Four and, of all things, American Gladiators! These 'heroes' look utterly ridiculous! These are possibly the worst superhero costumes ever designed. I suppose the two females look okay to me, but that's because I'm biased, male & heterosexual. But the guys look stupid, they wear what looks like jogging shorts.

Sadly, they'r e not much better in their wimpy, non-costumed forms. There's a dumb blond girl (and she's ugly! At least this series offers equal opportunity!) who becomes 'Centaur', a token black ('Apollo'), a voluptuous brunette ('Scorpio') and some blond guy ('T aurus') so geeky I question his manhood! Most of each episode deals with petty stories, poor humor and boring situations as these irritating twits interact with themselves, each other, and other uninteresting high school students. But eventually, they turn into their 'heroic' (if you can call it that) Galactic Sentinel forms to do battle with 'giant' (?) monsters. The heroes are also supposedly giant, and played by bodybuilders (it's obvious we'r e not seeing the same set of actors as in the 'comedic' scenes). Just because they're all giants, don't expect any FX-extravaganza Ultraman-ish fun! Making the heroes giant, in this case, is merely a cheap way to keep all the action on a claustrophobic set, so there needn't be any outdoors or on-location shooting, or the need for any epic battles involving henchmen. There's a limited number of miniature sets used; one is a cheap-looking desert setting which is far from convincing, and another is a city at night (and definitely the better of the two). Though I don't watch this series very often, I've never seen any with fleeing people or witnesses. It seems as though nobody is around, or even notices there's a battle of giants! The battles are punctuated by the same kind of acid rock-influenced music as in the other three programs. There are video generated FX (lasers), acrobatics, and karate kicks. While the choreography isn't all bad, it takes more than a little fancy footwork to make a hit show. 1/2 -DF

BLANKMAN

Dir.: Mike Binder

It seems that the makers of this film forgot one thing when they made this superhero spoof. The one thing they forgot was comedy. There are more laughs in an old episode of the George Reeves SUPERMAN series. Just watching an overweight man playing Superman is all I need to laugh. But all we get here is Damon Wayans playing a retard who decides he wants to be a crimefighter. The director must have thought this premise was as funny as an overweight George Reeves but isn't. The only funny scene is when Damon (not the editor) is watching a talkshow and they have superhero wannabes on the show. One of them was Gayman, who was dressed in one of those leather outfits that most gay people from San Francisco wear. */DF here, I rather disagree with Garo on his statement about homosexuals in San Fransissy. I doubt there's enough leather in the world for all of them to wear!/*

Damon and David Alan Grier are brothers who still live with their grandmother. Their grandmother is very vocal about getting the mob out of her neighborhood but the mob gets upset and rubs her out. Damon then decides he wants to be a superhero. You see Damon is a bit of a retard, so his brother usually ends up cleaning up after Damon's messes. But Damon makes some inventions that help him out in his crusades and he ends up becoming a hero in his community. That is until the mob takes hostage the woman he loves (Robin Givens) so Damon and David have to band together to save the woman and stop the evil mob. To bad it couldn't be better . All IN LIVING COLOR fans can do better by watching Damon's br other's movie LOW DOWN DIRTY SHAME, which delivers the goods, action and comedy wise. 1/2 -Garo Nigoghossian

THUNDER BIG MAN

Released 11/25/92, Produced by Myung Seung, Cameraman: Yan Ng Giu

Rather disappointing, even for just another cheap, childish movie from Korea; again with endless shenanigans about goofy school kids.

These annoying twerps take up way more of THUNDER BIG MAN than the "Thunder Big Men" (a super - hero team) themselves! So this substandard excuse for a superhero comedy packs in endless discussions and dumb gags. As is often the case with Korean films, it's a poor attempt to imitate the Japanese stuff, but without the budget for enough special effects or action. So its two fights are spread well apart, with brief, sporadic shots of FX, and it's all padded out & stretched out with economical scenes of drama and comedy which takes up 95% of THUNDER BIG MAN.

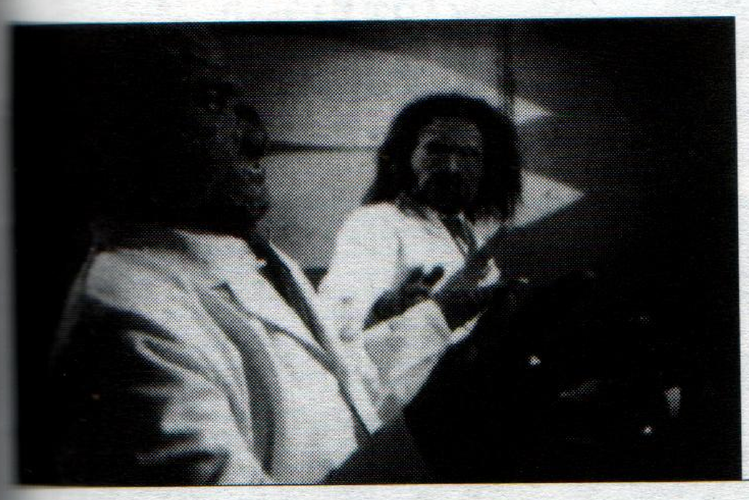
The only Korean word I know is kima (which I think means 'horse'), which certainly didn't help me follow an already simple enough story. The ever handy scan button was put to good use as I sat through this dialogue heavy, stupidity heavy comedy. I must admit, what few FX used aren't bad. There are electrical beams super-imposed throughout, and the costumes are okay, about equal to what the Japanese originators were doing in the late 1970s (1978's MESSAGE FROM SPACE TV series comes to mind). Its two battles show such potential! Any country which invented Tae Kwon Do is bound to have exciting moments in their films, as THUNDER BIG MAN proves. The martial arts were directed by Yan Ng Giu. The first fight lasts mere seconds, as an uncostumed hero thwarts a purse-snatching on the street. It's okay, but not until the climactic, five minute fight at the end of THUNDER BIG MAN does this otherwise poor movie finally earn its two stars (a kind gesture on my part; a generous rating indeed!)! The three Thunder Big Men tackle two rampaging, blue & red haired mutations (kinda' like witches, kinda' not), via acrobatics, electric beams, martial arts, and maybe a small explosion or two. Had the whole movie been like its final five minutes, this would be a great flick! But Korea rarely makes great flicks.

Storywise, an excavation uncovers a crashed meteor which hatches a cute little E.T.-



like Martian, actually looking more like a cross between Minya (Godzilla's first son) and a slug. After he plays around with school kiddies, two greedy scientists try to kidnap & exploit him, so the cute little monster scratches them. I don't know what kind of poison is in his claws, but its side effect is that it changes corrupt scientists into acrobatic mutants who control electricity! One of these mutants is played by Chyong Giu Young. These powerful monsters kidnap a scientist with a fake mustache, so it's the Thunder Big Men to the rescue! But they're not big, nor are they all men. One is a female who's a nurse

at some bogus health clinic. Another is a transvestite! Homosexual superheroes are a rarity, but this seems to be the case, he wears drag for his day job at some coffee shop! Anyway, the leader of the heroic trio is a yuppie (played by Hu Gu Bum), and all three finally change into their superhero form for the climax. Though the battle is nice, the movie ends on a cliffhanger! The two mutants are defeated, so it's up to our three Korean space-age heroes to find the innocent, wandering ET with antennas, to make sure he doesn't accidently create more marauding mutants! I guess I'll have to find the second film to see what happens, and oh the suspense is killing me. Interesting to note that the video box has a photo of adult aliens not even in the film, but probably in Part 2. ** -DF







THUNDER BIG MAN

SANTO-LA LEYENDA DEL ENMASCARO DE PLATA

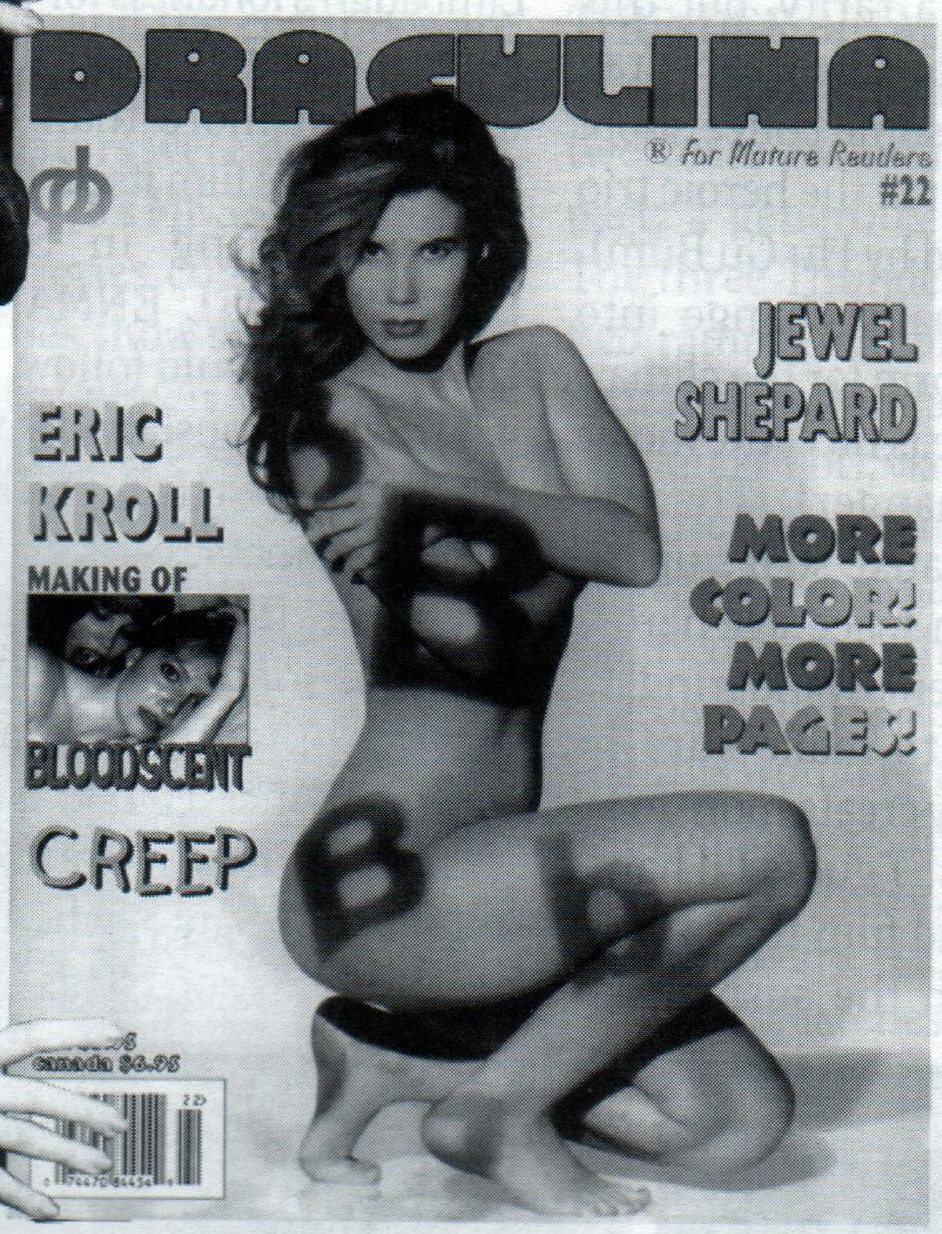
A Televicene Presentation, 1993, Exec. Prod.: Gabriela Obregon

Jesus Christ, did this TV-made Mexican effort ever suck or what?! This is one of those flicks so bewilderingly worthless, it's amazing anyone bothered. A complete load of crap from start to finish; it's obvious nobody in Mexico is putting any money or effort into wrestling movies any more. Of course, my Spanish is as lacking as Rush Limbaugh's fondness for The Gr een Party, and since English subtitles would cost more than the entire budget of this film itself, there's vir - tually nothing in SANTO-LA LEYENDA DEL ENMASCARACO DE PLATA I could follow. But even if it had any translation it wouldn't matter-- boring, talky, dull, slowpaced movies are terrible in any language. It's too bad, the movie had potential, there's some nice cinematography, and as for the music, it's incr edibly bad.

It does briefly feature the one and only El Santo, when his ghost speaks to his son. This 'ghost' is actually stock footage from an older Santo Sr. movie, MYSTERLY OF THE BLACK PEARL. From that point on, Santo's r eal-life son, himself an accomplished wrestler takes over the film and gets the main spotlight. But son of Santo, or 'El Hijo Del Santo', as those Mexicans down in Mexico call him, lacks the charisma of his late father. Perhaps Santo Jr. could be more impressive if he made movies (TV movies or otherwise) which were at least watchable, which this stinker definitely is not! They even shot footage of Santo's tomb (also seen in THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILM SHOW).

The story, for what it's wor th, concentrates on three separate subplots: 1. Some man is apparently chased by a lynch mob, I guess. They surround his house and shoot at him, so he gets out his rifle and fires back. 2. The man in the house has a son called Benito (Erik Sanchez) who's an avid El Santo fan, if not a groupie. 3. El Hijo Del Santo wears a red mask, and always gets defeated in comparatively mediocre (compared to other Mexi-wrestling movies) matches in the ring, he loses to the Blue Panther, Tornado and anyone else. Eventually, that irritating brat Benito sneaks into the dressing room and cries because Santo Jr. refuses to wear his father's silver mask, instead preferring to have his own individual, unique identity. But shortly before the end of the film, the new Santo gives in, and gets out his father's mask, kept in a safe. The classic silver mask has mist & smoke all around it, it's the mystique of the Santo mask! After such a big build up, the climax is a real let down. While his victorious bout in the ring against Tornado is the best in the flick, the confrontation with the gun-wielding cowboys bent on burning Benito's house down is one of the very, very worst fights ever put on film! Santo wears a cool costume, and his car even fires a laser beam (highly out-of-place in this movie!), the fist fight lasts only a few seconds and just plain stinks. It had wacky potential, Santo even uses Wonder Woman-like bracelets to his advantage. -DF

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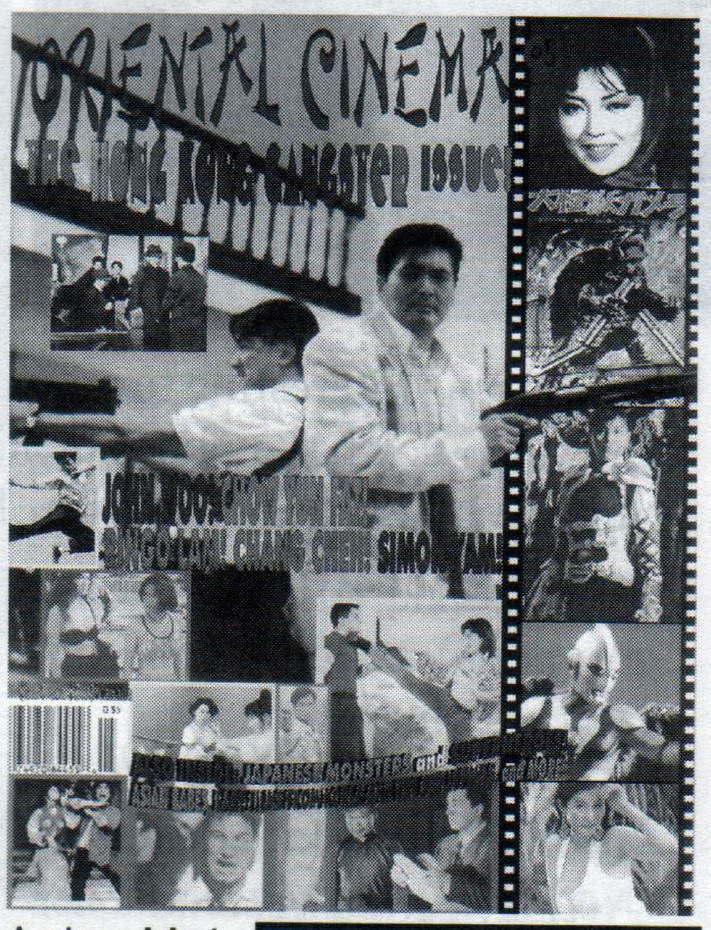
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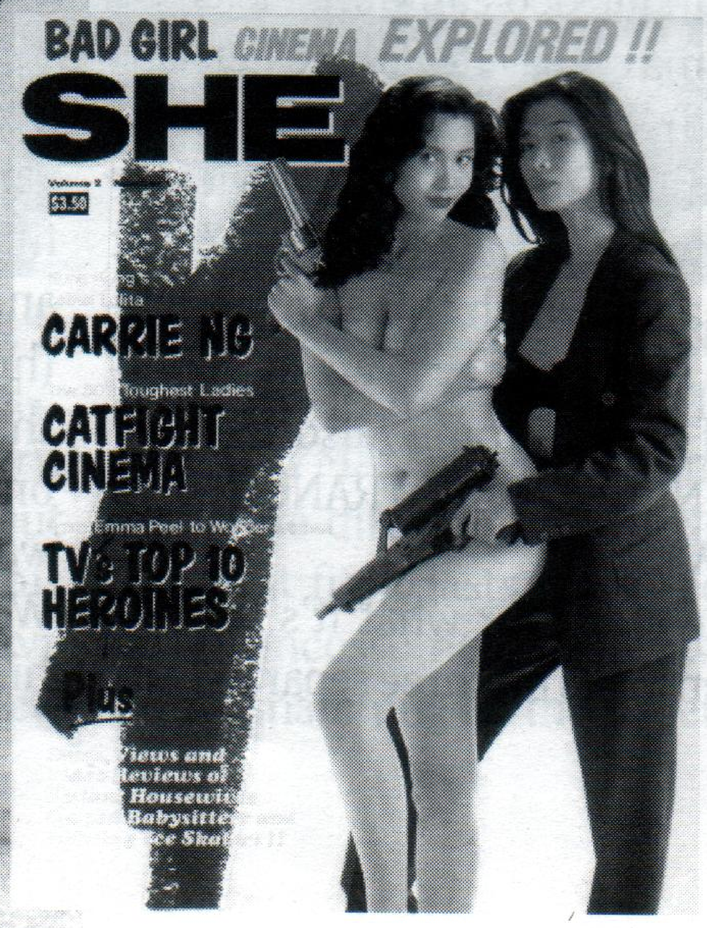
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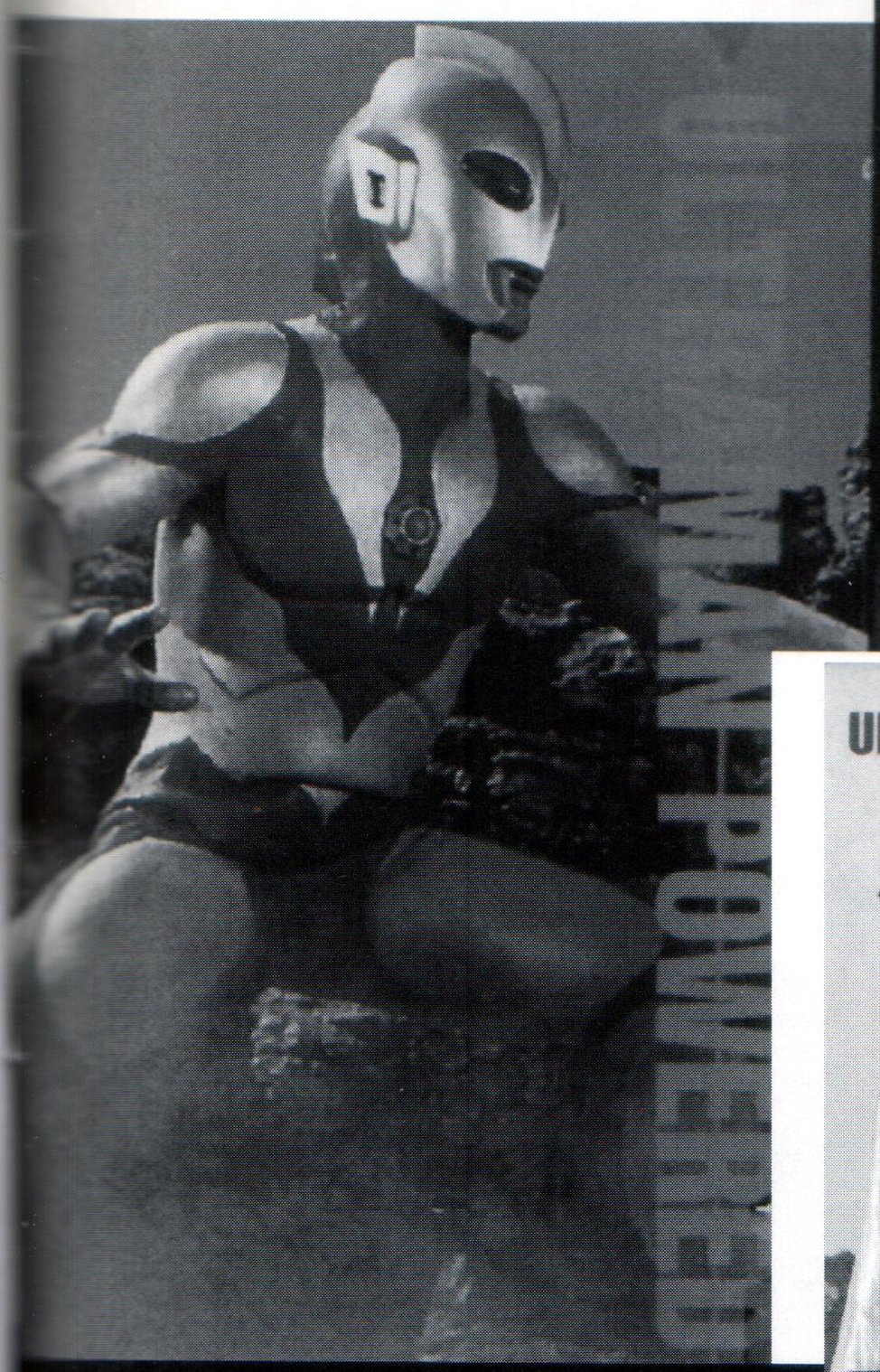
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(continued from front inside front cover)

tot. I can recall my kindergarten class, and how we'd all go crazy and talk about Ultraman and Hayata! Pretty amazing to think that American twerps were learning at an early age, how to pronounce Japanese names like Hayata, Mura, Ito, Fuji, etc.! ULTRAMAN eventually went off the air, and it wasn't until my mother took me to Japan Center (in San Francisco) on my 9th or 10th birthday when I discovered that there'd been many other Ultra Brothers in Japan, since ULTRAMAN disappeared from local TV! Books in the stores introduced me to ULTRASEVEN, ULTRAMAN TARO and the other Ultra Brothers. For years, all my birthday money & allowances was spent on Japanese superhero books for the remainder of the 1970s. Around 1977, the first ULTRAMAN finally returned to Northern California's bay ar ea. I was now probably in 6th, 7th or 8th grade (it's har d to tell; I cut class a lot), and I could finally watch my big hero in action once again! Unfortunately, the whole show was condensed to make room for some kiddie host calling himself Captain Cosmic (played by then-popular TV personality & horror movies host Bob Wilkins). The CAPTAIN COSMIC show must have cut 5-10 minutes from each episode (and they similarly butchered SPACE GIANTS, SPECTREMAN, STARBLAZERS, and JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT), yet that never damaged the fun, what we didn't see didn't hurt us.



When VCRs became fashionable in the early 1980s, we Ultra fans could finally see the other Ultra Brothers in action! Of course, unlike ULTRAMAN (and later ULTRASEVEN), they were all in Japanese, so the dialogue scenes reeked of boredom. But we could now finally see the likes of Ultraman Leo in action! Of course, by this point, the Ultra Brothers had inspired endless imitations, Japanese TV shows like: MIRRORMAN, JUMBORG ACE, JUMBORG 9, RED BARON, MAHA BARON, SILVER KAMEN, IRON KING, ZONE FIGHTER, THUNDER MASK, MEGALOMAN, SPECTREMAN, GRIDMAN, FIREMAN, GREENMAN, and the bewilderingly cheap RED MAN. While none of these programs will be completely ignored in this magazine, this column will focus on the Ultra Brothers specifically. To be continued!







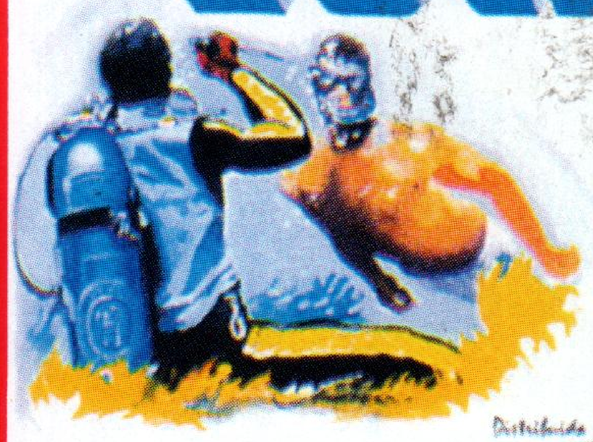


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